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The saint® MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH
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In this issue

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AUGUST DERLETH

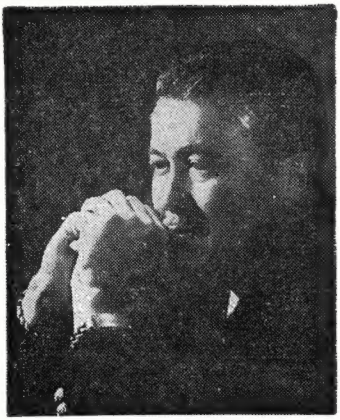
LESLIE CHARTERIS

WATCH FOR The saint ON TV

errand boy

A New Story by RICHARD DEMING

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



As I was gazing at my bookshelves the other day, with the soulful and far-away expression which I normally wear when searching for any excuse to postpone going to work, I was struck by an oddity which I had never paid any conscious attention to before.

When the titles of books are lettered lengthways along their spines, which is the only part you see when they are on the shelf, the British and American style is to do this from top to bottom, or in such a way that to read it more comfortably you would tilt your head to the right, to approximate the natural reading position that would confront you if the book happened to be lying face upwards. But in a cosmopolitan collection such as mine, thanks largely to the translations of my own Immortal Works in various languages, this convention is revealed as far from universal. The Dutch and the Scandinavians, for instance, adhere to the Anglo-American system; but the French and the Germans, with symbolic unanimity, adopt the opposite method, lettering their spines as if the books had been lying face down when it was done, and making you tilt your head to the left for easier reading of this bottom-to-top inscription in the shelf position. In this they are followed by Portugal and Spain; but Mexico, as if uncertain to follow its Hispanic or its American affiliation, seems to print either way, according to the fancy of the publisher.

From which observations I was led to wonder whether there could be some strange racial, national, or temperamental tendency which makes it come more naturally to some people to incline their heads to the left, while others lean more easily to the right.

Finding no obvious common denominator in the evidence before me, I was led on (not too reluctantly, for this was still more fun than concentrating on a story) to speculate about the equally arbitrary choice of left or right as a side of the road on which to drive, which is a considerable irritant and no insignificant hazard to the multiplying hordes of world travellers in this jet age. Although Sweden, the last independent member of the left-side league, recently converted to driving on the right like the rest of Europe, the next most enduring legacy of the British Empire, after the English language, to its loosening and perhaps disintegrating Commonwealth, is the heritage of driving on the left, which persists in such former dependencies as Australia, India, and the West Indies.

It is convincingly argued by its supporters that the left-hand side of the road is the only proper and traditional side, whether because it gave clearance for a coachman's whip or because it presented a cavalier's sword arm to the approach of possible enemies. Why, then, did so many countries swing to the impractical opposite, when they first became aware of a Traffic Problem and the need for some regulation?

Could it have been because of the mystic double meaning which the word "right" enjoys in most European languages?

Then why do they "keep to the right" in Moscow?

I yield to the anthropologists and sociologists. I have to get back to work.

Yours Charles

The® saint
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MARCH, 1965

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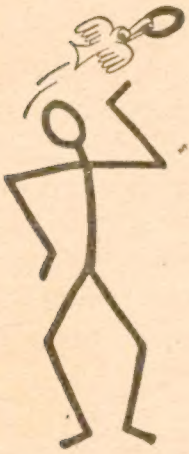

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the wonderful war

by Leslie Charteris

THE REPUBLIC of Pasala lies near the northward base of the Yucatan peninsula in Central America. It has an area of about 10,000 square miles, or roughly the size of England from the Tweed to a line drawn from Liverpool to Hull. Population, about 18,000. Imports, erratic. Exports, equally erratic, and consisting (when the population can be stirred to the necessary labour) of maize, rice, sugar-cane, mahogany, and—oil.

"You can hurry up and warble all you know about this oil, Archie," said Simon Templar briskly, half an hour after he landed at Santa Miranda. "And you can leave out your adventures among the *señoritas*. I want to get this settled—I've got a date back in England for the end of May, and that doesn't give me a lot of time here."

Mr. Archibald Sheridan stirred slothfully in his long chair and took a pull at a whisky-and-soda in which ice clinked seductively.

"You've had it all in my letters and cables," he said. "But

Without even glancing at the copyright date, even Claud Eustace Teal would not have to read far to deduce that this story was written in the happy days before Castro, when Latin-American "banana republics" were still rather comical and revolutions were uncomplicated by cosmic ideologies. And when, as a matter of history, one or two daredevil soldiers of fortune actually could (and did) topple governments and change the histories of foreign lands. L.C.

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I'll just run through it again to connect it up. It goes like this. Three years ago almost to the day, a Scots mining engineer named McAndrew went prospecting round the hills about fifty miles inland. Everyone said he was crazy—till he came back six months later with samples from his feeler borings. He said he'd struck one of the richest deposits that ever gushed—and it was only a hundred feet below the surface. He got a concession—chiefly because the authorities still couldn't believe his story—staked his claim, cabled for his daughter to come over and join him, and settled down to feel rich and wait for the plant he'd ordered to be shipped over from New Orleans."

"Did the girl come?" asked Templar.

"She's right here," answered Sheridan. "But you told me to leave the women out of it. She doesn't really come into the story anyway. The man who does come in is a half-caste bum from God knows where, name of Shannet. Apparently Shannet had been sponging and beachcombing here for months before McAndrew arrived. Everyone was down on him, and so McAndrew, being one of these quixotic idiots, joined up with him. He even took him into partnership, just to defy public opinion; and, anyhow, he was wanting help, and Shannet had some sort of qualifications. The two of them went up into the interior to take a look at the claim. Shannet came back, but McAndrew didn't. Shannet said a snake got him."

Simon Templar reached for another cigarette.

"Personally, I say that snake's was Shannet," remarked Archie Sheridan quietly. "Lilla — McAndrew's daughter — said the same thing. Particulary when Shannet produced a written agreement signed by McAndrew and himself in which it was arranged that if either partner should die, all rights in the claim should pass to the other partner. Lilla swore that McAndrew, who'd always thought first of her, would never have signed such a document, and she got a look at it and said the signature was forged. Shannet replied that McAndrew was getting over a bout of malaria when he signed it, and his hand was rather shaky. The girl carried it right to the court of what passes for justice here, fighting like a hero, but Shannet had too big a pull with the judge, and she lost her case. I arrived just after her appeal was turned down."

"What about McAndrew's body?"

"Shannet said he buried it by the trail; but the jungle trails here are worse than any maze that was ever invented, and you can almost see the stuff grow. The grave could quite reasonably be lost in a week. Shannet said he couldn't find it again. I took a trip that way myself, but it wasn't any use. All I got out of it was a bullet through a perfectly good hat from some sniper in the background—Shannet for a fiver."

"After which," sugested Simon Templar thoughtfully, "Shannet found he couldn't run the show alone, and sold out to our dear friend in London, Master Hugo Campard, shark, swindler, general blackguard, and promoter of unlimited dud companies——"

"Who perpetrated the first sound company of his career, Pasala Oil Products, on the strength of it," Sheridan completed. "Shares not for public issue, and sixty percent of them held by himself."

Simon Templar took his cigarette from his mouth and blew a long, thin streamer of smoke into the sunlight.

"So that's what I've come over to deal with, Archibald?" he murmured. "Well, well, *well!* . . . Taken by and large, it looks like a diverting holiday. Carol a brief psalm about things political, son."

"Just about twice as crooked as anything else south of the United States border," said Sheridan. "The man who matters isn't the President. He's under the thumb of what they call the Minister of the Interior, who finds it much more convenient and much safer to stay in the background—they never assassinate Ministers of the Interior, apparently, but Presidents are fair game. And this man—Manuel Concepcion de Villega is his poetic label—is right under the wing of Shannet, and is likely to stay there as long as Shannet's money lasts."

The Saint rose and lounged over to the veranda rail. At that hour (which was just after midday) the thermometer stood at a hundred and two in the shade, and the Saint had provided himself suitably with white ducks. The dazzling whiteness of them would have put snow to shame; and he wore them, as might have been expected of him, with the most cool and careless elegance in the world. He looked as if he would have found an inferno chilly. His dark hair was brushed smoothly back; his lean face was tanned to a healthy brown; altogether he must have been the most dashing

and immaculate sight that Santa Miranda had set eyes on for many years.

Sheridan was in despair before that vision of unruffled perfection. His hair was tousled, his white ducks looked somewhat limp with the heat, and his pleasantly ugly face was moist.

"What about the rest of the white, or near-white, inhabitants?" inquired the Saint.

"A two-fisted, rip-roaring giant of a red-headed Irishman named Kelly," was the reply. "His wife—that's two. Lilla McAndrew, who's staying with them—I wouldn't let her put up at the filthy hotel in the town any longer—three. Four and five, a couple of traders, more or less permanently drunk and not worth considering. Six — Shannet. That's the lot."

The Saint turned away and gazed down the hillside. From where he stood, on the veranda of Sheridan's bungalow, he could look down onto the roofs of Santa Miranda—the cluster of white buildings in the Moorish style which formed the centre, and the fringe of adobe huts on the outskirts. Left and right of him, on the hill above the town, were other bungalows. Beyond the town was the sea.

The Saint studied the view for a time in silence; then he turned round again.

"We seem to be onto the goods," he remarked. "Shannet, the small fish, but an undoubted murderer — and, through him, our real man, Campard. I had a hunch I shouldn't be wasting your time when I sent you out here as soon as I heard Campard was backing Pasala Oil Products. But I never guessed P.O.P. would be real till I got your first cable. Now we're on a truly classy piece of velvet. It all looks too easy.

"Easy?" queried Sheridan skeptically. "I'm glad you think it's easy. With Shannet's claim established and the concession in writing at Campard's London office, and Lilla McAndrew's petition dismissed, and Shannet winding the government, the army, the police, and the rest of the bunch, down to the last office boy, round and round his little finger with the money he gets from Campard —and the man calls it easy. Oh, take him away!"

The Saint's hands drove even deeper into his pockets. Tall and trim and athletic, he stood with his feet astride, swaying gently from his toes, with the Saintly smile flickering faintly round his mouth and a little dancing devil of mischief rousing in his blue eyes.

"I said easy," he drawled.

Sheridan buried his face in his hands.

"Go and put your head in the ice bucket," he pleaded. "Of course, it's the sun. You're not used to it—I forgot that."

"How big is the army?"

"There's a standing army of about five hundred, commanded by seventeen generals, twenty-five colonels, and about fifty minor officers. And if your head hurts, just lie down, close the eyes, and relax. It'll be quite all right in an hour or two."

"Artillery?"

"Three pieces, carried by mules. If you'd like some aspirin——"

"Navy?"

"One converted tug, with 5.9 quick-firer and crew of seven, commanded by two admirals. I don't think you ought to talk now. I'll put up the hammock for you, if you like, and you can sleep for an hour before lunch."

"Police force?"

"There are eleven constables in Santa Miranda, under three superintendents. And in future I shouldn't have any whisky before sundown."

The Saint smiled.

"I'm probably more used to the sun than you are," he said. "This is merely common sense. What's the key to the situation? The government. Right. We don't propose to waste any of our good money bribing them—and if we did, they'd double-cross us. Therefore they must be removed by force. And at once, because I can't stay long. Long live the revolution!'

"Quite," agreed Sheridan helplessly. "And the revolutionary army? This state is the only one in South America that's never had a revolution—because nobody's ever had enough energy to start one."

The Saint fished for his cigarette case.

"We are the revolutionary army," he said. "I ask you to remember that we march on our stomachs. So we'll just have another drink, and then some lunch, and then we'll wander along and try to enlist the mad Irishman. If we three can't make rings round six hundred and fifteen comic-opera dagoes, I'm going to retire from the fighting game and take up knitting and fancy needlework!"

"My dear soul," the Saint was still arguing persuasively at the close of the meal, "it's so simple. The man who manages the government of this two-by-four backyard is the man who holds the fate of

Pasala Oil Products in his hands. At present Shannet is the bright boy who manages the government, and the master of P.O.P. is accordingly walking around under the Shannet hat. We'll go one better. We won't merely manage the government. We'll *be* the government. And P.O.P. is ours to play hell with as we like. Could anything be more straightforward, as the actress said when the bishop showed her his pass-book."

"Go on," encouraged Sheridan weakly. "Don't bother about my feelings."

"As the actress said to the bishop shortly afterwards," murmured the Saint. "Blessed old Archie, it's abvious that three months in this enervating climate and the society of Lilla McAndrew have brought your energy down to the level of that of the natives you spoke of so contemptuously just now. I grant you it's sudden, but it's the only way. Before I knew the whole story I thought it would be good enough if we held up the post office and sent Campard a spoof cable purporting to come from Shannet, telling him the government had been kicked out, the concession revoked, and the only thing to do was to sell out his Pop holdings as quickly as possible. What time our old friend Roger, back in London, snaps up the shares, discreetly, as fast as they come on the market."

"Why won't that work now?

"You're forgetting the girl," said Templar. "This oil is really her property, so it isn't good enough just to make Campard unload at a loss and sell back to him at a premium when the rumour of revolution is exploded. The concession has really got to be revoked. Therefore I propose to eliminate the present government, and make Kelly, your mad Irishman, the new Minister of the Interior. That is, unless you'd take the job."

"No, thanks," said Sheridan generously. "It's not quite in my line. Pass me up."

The Saint lighted a cigarette.

"In that case Kelly is elected unanimously," he remarked with charming simplicity. "So the only thing left to decide is how we start the trouble. I've been in South American revolutions before, but they've always been well under way by the time I arrived. The technique of starting the blamed things was rather missed out of my education. What does one do? Does one simply wade into the Presidential Palace, chant 'Time, gentlemen, please!' in the ear of his illustrious excellency, and in-

vite him to close the door as he goes out? Or what?"

"What, probably," said Sheridan. "That would be as safe as anything. I might get you reprieved on the grounds of insanity."

The Saint sighed.

"You aren't helpful, Beautiful Archibald."

"If you'd settle down to talk seriously——"

"I am serious."

Sheridan stared. Then:

"Is that straight, Saint?" he demanded.

"From the horse's mouth," the Saint assured him solemnly. "Even as the crow flieth before the pubs open. Sweet cherub, did you really think I was wasting precious time with pure pickled onions?"

Sheridan looked at him. There was another flippant rejoinder on the tip of Archie Sheridan's tongue, but somehow it was never uttered.

The Saint was smiling. It was a mocking smile, but that was for Sheridan's incredulity. It was not the sort of smile that acompanies a test of the elasticity of a leg. And in the Saint's eyes was a light that wasn't entirely humorous.

Archie Sheridan, with a cigarette in his mouth, fumbling for matches, realized that he had mistaken the shadow for the substance. The Saint wasn't making fun of revolutions. It was just that his sense of humour was too big to let him plan even a revolution without seeing the funny side of the show.

Sheridan got a match to his cigarette.

"Well?" prompted the Saint.

"I think you're pots, bats, and bees," he said. "But if you're set on that kind of suicide—lead on. Archibald will be at your elbow with the bombs. You didn't forget the bombs?"

The Saint grinned.

"I had to leave them behind," he replied lightly. "They wouldn't fit into my sponge bag. Seriously, now, where and how do you think we should start the trouble?"

They were sitting opposite one another at Sheridan's bare mahogany dining table, and at the Saint's back was the open door leading out onto the verandah and commanding an uninterrupted view of the approach to the bungalow.

"Start the thing here and now and anyhow you like," said Sheridan, and he was looking past the Saint's shoulder towards the veranda steps.

Simon Templar settled back a little more lazily into his chair, and a very Saintly meekness was spreading over his face. "Name?" he inquired laconically.

"Shannet himself."

The Saint's eyes were half closed.

"I will compose a little song about him immediately," he said.

Then a shadow fell across the table, but the Saint did not move at once. He appeared to be lost in a day-dream.

"*Buenos dias,* Shannet," said Archie Sheridan. "Also, as soon as possible, *adiós.* Hurry up and say what you've got to say before I kick you out."

"I'll do any kicking out that's necessary, thanks," said Shannet harshly. "Sheridan, I've come to warn you off for the last time. The *Andalusia* berthed this morning, and she sails again on the evening tide. You've been nosing around here too long as it is. Is that plain enough?"

"Plainer than your ugly face," drawled Sheridan. "And by what right do you kick me out? Been elected President, have you?"

"You know me," said Shannet. "You know that what I say here goes. You'll sail on the *Andalusia*—either voluntarily or because you're put on board in irons. That's all. . . . What's this?"

The Saint, perceiving himself to be the person thus referred to, awoke sufficiently to open his eyes and screw his head round so that he could view the visitor.

He saw a tall, broad-shouldered man of indeterminate age, clad in a soiled white suit of which the coat was unbuttoned to expose a grubby singlet. Shannet had certainly not shaved for two days; and he did not appear to have brushed his hair for a like period, for a damp, sandy lock drooped in a tangle over his right eye. In one corner of his mouth a limp and dilapidated cigarette dangled tiredly from his lower lip.

The Saint blinked.

"Gawd!" he said offensively. "Can it be human?"

Shannet's fists swept back his coat and rested on his hips. "What's your name, Cissy?" he demanded.

The Saint flicked some ash from his cigarette and rose to his feet delicately.

"Benito Mussolini," he answered mildly. "And you must be one of the corporation scavengers. How's the trade in garbage?" His gentle eyes swept Shannet from crown to toe. "Archie, there must have been some mistake. The real scavenger has gone sick, and one of his riper pieces of refuse is deputizing for him. I'm sorry."

"If you——"

"I said I was sorry," the

Saint continued, in the same smooth voice, "because I'm usually very particular about the people I fight, and I hate soiling my hands on things like you."

Shannet glowered.

"I don't know who you are," he said, "and I don't care. But if you're looking for a fight you can have it."

"I am looking for a fight, dear one," drawled the Saint. "In fact, I'm looking for a lot of fights, and you're the first one that's offered. 'Cissy' is a name I particularly object to being called, O misbegotten of a pig!"

The last words were spoken in colloquial Spanish, and the Saint made more of them than it is possible to report in printable English. Shannet went white, then red.

"You——"

His answering stream of profanity merged into a left swing to the Saint's jaw, which, if it had landed, would have ended the fight there and then. But it did not land.

Simon Templar swayed back, and the swing missed by a couple of inches. As Shannet stumbled, momentarily off his balance, the Saint reached round and took the jug of ice water off the table behind him. Without any appearance of effort or haste, he sidestepped and poured most of the contents of the jug down the back of Shannet's neck.

Shannet swung again. The Saint ducked, and sent the man flying with a smashing jab to the nose.

"Look out, Saint!' Sheridan warned suddenly.

"Naughty!" murmured the Saint, without heat.

Shannet was getting to his feet, and his right hand was drawing something from his hip pocket.

The Saint took two steps and a flying leap over Shannet's head, turning in the air as he did so. Shannet had only got to his knees when the Saint landed behind him and caught his opponent's throat and right wrist in hands that had the strength of steel cables in their fingers. Shannet's wrist was twisted behind his back with an irresistible wrench. . . .

The gun clattered to the floor simultaneously with Shannet's yelp of agony, and the Saint picked up the gun and stepped away.

"A trophy, Archie!" he cried, and tossed the weapon over to Sheridan. "Guns I have not quite been shot with —there must be a drawer full of them at home. . . . Let's start, sweet Shannet!"

Shannet replied with a chair, but the Saint was ten feet away by the time it crashed into the opposite wall.

Then Shannet came in again with his fists. Any one of those whirling blows carried a kick that would have put a mule to sleep, but the Saint had forgotten more about ringcraft than many professionals ever learn. Shannet never came near touching him. Every rush Shannet made, somehow, expended itself on thin air, while he always seemed to be running his face slap into the Saint's stabbing left.

"Want a rest?" the Saint asked kindly.

"If you'd come in and fight like a man," gasped Shannet, his tortured chest heaving, "I'd kill you!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" said the Saint in a bored voice, as though he had no further interest in the affair. "Hurry up and get out—I'm going to be busy."

He turned away, but Shannet lurched after him.

"Get out yourself!" snarled the man thickly. "D'you hear? I'm going right down to fetch the police——"

The Saint sat down.

"Listen to me, Shannet," he said quietly. "The less you talk about police when I'm around, the better for you. I'm telling you now that I believe you murdered a man named McAndrew not so long ago, and jumped his claim on a forged parnership agreement. I'm only waiting till I've got the proof. And then—well, it's too much to hope that the authorities of this benighted republic will execute the man who pays half their salaries, and so in the name of Justice I shall take you myself and hang you from a high tree."

For a moment of silence the air seemed to tingle with the same electric tension as heralds the breaking of a thunderstorm, while the Saint's ice-blue eyes quelled Shannet's reawakening fury; and then, with a short laugh, the Saint relaxed.

"You're a pawn in the game," he said, with a contrasting carelessness which only emphasized the bleak implacibility of his last speech. "We won't waste good melodrama on you. We reserve that for clients with really important discredit accounts. Instead, you shall hear the epitaph I've just composed for you. It commemorates a pestilent tumour named Shannet, who disfigured the face of this plane. He started some fun, but before it was done he was wishing he'd never began it. That otherwise immortal verse is marred by a grammatical error, but I'm not expecting you to know any better. . . . Archibald—the door!"

Archie Sheridan had no reason to love Shannet, and the kick with which he launched the man into the garden was not gentle, but he seemed to derive no pleasure from it.

He came back with a grave face and resumed his chair facing the Saint.

"Well," he said, "you've done what you wanted. Now shall we sit down and make our wills, or shall we spend our last hours of life in drinking and song?"

"Of course, we may be shot," admitted the Saint calmly. "That's up to us. How soon can we expect the army?"

"Not before five. They'll all be asleep now, and an earthquake wouldn't make the Pasala policeman break off his siesta. Much less the army, who are inclined to give themselves airs. We might catch the *Andalusia*," he added hopefully.

The Saint surveyed him seraphically.

"Sweetheart," he said, "that joke may now be considered over. We've started, and we've got to keep moving. As I don't see the fun of sitting here waiting for the other side to surround us, I guess we'll bounce right along and interview Kelly. And when you two have coached me thoroughly in the habits and topography of Santa Miranda, well just toddle along and capture the town."

"Just toddle along and which?" repeated Sheridan dazedly.

The Saint spun a cigarette high into the air, and trapped it neatly between his lips as it fell.

"That is to say, *I* will capture the town," he corrected himself, "while you and Kelly create a disturbance somewhere to distract their attention. Wake up, sonny! Get your hat, and let's go!"

The Saint's breezy way of saying that he would "just toddle along and capture the town" was a slight exaggeration. As a matter of fact, he spent nearly four days on the job.

There was some spade-work to be done, and certain preparations to be made, and the Saint devoted a considerable amount of care and sober thought to these details. Though his methods, to the uninformed observer, might always have seemed to savour of the reckless, tip-and-run, hit - first - and - ask - questions - afterwards school, the truth was that he rarely stepped out of any frying pan without first taking the tem-

perature of the fire beyond.

Even in such a foolhardy adventure as that in which he was then engaged, he knew exactly what he was doing, and legislated against failure as well as he might; for, even in the most outlandish parts of the world, the penalty of unsuccessful revolution is death, and the Saint had no overwhelming desire to turn his interesting biography into an obituary notice.

He explained his plan to Kelly, and found the Irishman an immediate convert to the Cause.

"Shure, I've been thinkin' for years that it was time somebody threw out their crooked government," said that worthy, ruffling a hand like a ham through his tousled mop of flaming hair. "I'm just wonderin' now why I niver did it meself."

"It's a desperate chance," Simon Templar admitted. "But I don't mind taking it if you're game."

"Six years I've been here," mused Kelly ecstatically, screwing up a huge fist, "and I haven't seen a real fight. Exceptin' one or two disagreements with the natives, who run away afther the first round."

The Saint smiled. He could not have hoped to find a more suitable ally.

"We might easily win out," he said. 'It wouldn't work in England, but in a place like this——"

"The geography was made for us," said Kelly.

On a scrap of paper he sketched a rough map to illustrate his point.

Pasala is more or less in the shape of a wedge, with the base facing northeast on the seacoast. Near the centre of the base of the wedge in Santa Miranda. In the body of the wedge are the only other three towns worth mentioning—Las Flores, Rugio, and, near the apex, Esperanza. They are connected up by a cart track of a road which includes them in a kind of circular route that starts and finishes at Santa Miranda, for the State of Pasala does not yet boast a railway. This is hardly necessary, for the distance between Santa Miranda and Esperanza, the two towns farthest apart, is only one hundred and forty miles.

It should also be mentioned that the wedge-shaped territory of Pasala cuts roughly into the Republic of Maduro, a much larger and more civilized country.

"Of course, we're simply banking on the psychology of revolutions and the apathy of the natives," said the Saint, when they had finished dis-

cussing their plan of campaign. "The population aren't interested—if they're shown a man in a nice new uniform, and told that he's the man in power, they believe it, and go home and pray that they won't be any worse off than they were before. If we take off a couple of taxes, or something like that, as soon as we get in, the mob will be with us to a man. I'm sure the exchequer can stand it—I don't imagine Manuel Concepcion de Villega has been running this show without making a substantial profit on turnover."

"That'll fetch 'em," Kelly averred. "They're bled dry with taxes at present."

"Secondly, there's the army. They're like any other army. They obey their officers because it's never occurred to them to do any thing else. If they were faced with a revolution they'd fight it. So instead of that we'll present the revolution as an accomplished fact. If they're like any other South American army, they'll simply carry on under the new government — with a bonus of a few *pesos* per man to clinch the bargain."

They talked for a while longer; and then they went out and joined Archie Sheridan, who had not been present at the council, being otherwise occupied with Lilla McAndrew on the veranda.

The Saint had a little leisure to admire the girl. She was rather tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed, superbly graceful. Her sojourn in that sunny climate had coloured her skin a pale golden brown that was infinitely more becoming than mere pink-and-white; but the peachlike bloom of her complexion had not had time to suffer.

It was plain that Archie Sheridan was fatally smitten with the inevitable affliction, and the Saint was mischievously delighted.

"You want to be careful of him, Miss McAndrew," he advised gravely. "I've known him since he was so high, and you wouldn't believe what a past he's collected in his brief career of sin. Let's see. . . . There was Gladys, the golden-haired beauty from the front row of the Gaiety chorus, Susan, Beryl—no, two Beryls—Ethel, the artist's model, Angela, Sadie from California, Joan—two Joans—no, three Joans——"

"Don't believe him, Lilla," pleaded Archie. "He's been raving all day. Why, just before lunch he said he was Benito Mussolini!

The girl laughed.

"It's all right," she told Simon. "I don't take him

seriously."

"There's gratitude for you!" said Sheridan wildly. "After all I've done for her! I even taught her to speak English. When she arrived here she had a Scots accent that would have made a bawbee run for its life. She reeked of haggis——"

"Archie!"

"Haggis," persisted Sheridan. "She carried one around in her pibroch till it starved to death."

"What are pibroch?" asked the Saint curiously. "Are they something you wear under a kilt?"

When the girl had recovered her composure:

"Is he really so impossible?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know you well enough to tell you the whole truth," said the Saint solemnly. "The only hope I can give you is that you're the first Lilla in his life. Wait a minute—sorry—wasn't Lilla the name of the barmaid——"

"Go away," said Sheridan morosely. "With sudden death staring you in the face, you ought to be spending your time in prayer and repentance. You'll be shot at dawn to-morrow, and I shall look over the prison walls and cheer on the firing squad."

He watched Kelly and the Saint retire to the other end of the veranda, and then turned to the girl, with his pleasant face unusually serious.

"Lilla," he said, "I don't want to scare you, but it isn't all quite as funny as we make out. The Saint would still be laughing in the face of the firing squad I mentioned; but that doesn't make the possibility of the firing squad any less real."

She looked at him with sober eyes.

"Then it's easily settled," she said. "I won't let you do it."

Sheridan laughed.

"It isn't me you've got to deal with," he replied. "It's the Saint. Nothing you could say would stop *him*. He'd simply tell me to beat it with you on the *Andalusia* this evening if I was scared. And I'd rather face the said firing squad than have the Saint say that to me."

She would have protested further, but something in the man's tone silenced her. She knew that he was making no idle statement. She had no experience whatever of such things, and yet she realized intuitively what she was up against, recognized the heroic thing when she met it—the blind, unswerving loyalty of a man to his friend, the unshakable obedience of a man

to a loved leader. And she knew that any attempt she made to seduce her man from that reality would only lower herself in his eyes.

Perhaps there are few women who could have shown such an understanding, but Lilla McAndrew was—Lilla McAndrew.

She smiled suddenly.

"I've always wanted to see a revolution," she said simply.

Moments passed before Sheridan could grasp the full wonder of her sympathy and acquiescence. And then his arms went round her, and her hands tousled his hair.

"Dear Archie!" she said, and found herself unaccountably breathless.

"I admit every girl the Saint mentioned," said Sheridan defiantly. "And a few more. But that doesn't alter the fact that I love you, and as soon as this comic revolution's over I'm going to marry you."

"I'll believe that when you do it," she teased him; but her heart was on her lips when he kissed her. . . .

Some almost offensively discreet coughing from the Saint interrupted them ten minutes later.

"I tried to save you," said the Saint, declining to avert his shamelessly quizzical gaze from the girl's efforts to straighten her hair inconspicuously. 'And I'm sorry to have to butt in, but your boy friend and I have work to do. If you look down towards the town you'll see a file of men advancing up the main street in our direction, led by two men on horseback in the uniform of commissionaires. The entire police force of Santa Miranda, as far as I can make out from this distance, is on its way up here to arrest me for assaulting and battering one of their most prominent citizens, and to arrest Archie as an accessory before, after, and during the fact. They have just woken up from their afternoon snooze and have been put on the job by the aforesaid citizen with commendable rapidity. Will you excuse us if we escape?"

They went to the edge of the veranda and looked down. Below them, about a mile away, Santa Miranda, as yet hardly astir from its siesta, lay bathed in the afternoon sunshine.

The town, indeterminately vignetted at the edges, had a definite core of nearly modern white buildings ranged down its principal streets. These numbered two, and were in the form of a T. The top of the T ran parallel with the waterfront; the upright, half-

way down which was the Presidential Palace, ran inland for nearly a mile, tailing off in the mass of adobe huts which clustered round the core of the town.

From where they stood they could look down the length of the street which formed the upright of the T; and the situation was even as the Saint diagnosed it. . . .

"One minute for the fond farewell, Archie," said the Saint briskly, and Sheridan nodded.

Simon Templar drew Kelly inside the bungalow.

"By the way," he said, "do you happen to have such a thing as a good-looking pot of paint?"

"I've got some enamel," replied the mystified Kelly.

He produced a couple of tins, and the Saint selected one with every appearance of satisfaction.

"The very idea," he said. "It's just an idea of mine for dealing with this arrest business."

Kelly was suspicious.

"I don't seem to have much to do," he complained aggrievedly. "It's hoggin' the best of the fightin' yez are. Now, if I had my way, I'd be shtartin' the throuble with these policemen right away, I would."

"And wreck the whole show," said the Saint. "No, it's too soon for that. And if you call being fifty percent of an invading army 'having nothing to do' I can't agree. You're one of the most important members of the cast. Besides, if your bus doesn't break down, you'll be back here just when the rough stuff is warming up. You get it both ways."

He adjusted his hat to an appropriately rakish and revolutionary angle on his head, and went out to collect Archie Sheridan.

They shook hands with the still grumbling Kelly; but the Saint had the last word with Lilla McAndrew.

"I'm sorry I've got to take Archie," he said. "You see, he's the one man I can trust here who can tap out Morse fluently, and I sent him out from England for that very reason, though I didn't know it was going to pan out as it's panning out now. But I'll promise to get him back to you safe and sound. You need't worry. Only the good die young. I wonder how you've managed to live so long, Lilla?"

He smiled; and when the Saint smiled in that particularly gay and enchanting manner, it was impossible to believe that any adventure he undertook could fail.

"Archie is marked 'Fragile —With Care' for this journey," said the Saint, and went swinging down the veranda steps.

He walked back arm-in-arm with Sheridan to the latter's bungalow at a leisurely pace enough, for it was his last chance to give Sheridan his final instructions for the opening of the campaign.

Archie was inclined to voice much the same grievance as Kelly had vented, but Templar dealt shortly with that insubordination.

"I'm starting off by having the most boresome time of any of you," he said. "If I could do your job, I promise you I'd be making you do mine. That being so, I reckon I deserve a coresponding majority ration of excitement at the end. Anyway, with any luck we'll all be together again by Thursday, and we'll see the new area in in a bunch. And if you're going to say you've thought of another scheme that'd be just as effective, my answer is that you ought to have spoken up before. It's too late to change our plans now."

At the bungalow the Saint made certain preparations for the arrival of the police posse which to some extent depleted Archie Sheridan's travelling athletic outfit. That done, he sent Sheridan to his post, and himself settled down with a cigarette in an easy chair on the veranda to await the coming of the Law.

The *guindillas* came toiling up the last two hundred yards of slope in a disorderly straggle. The hill at that point became fairly steep, they were in poor condition, and, although the sun was getting low, the broiling heat of the afternoon had not yet abated; and these factors united to upset what might otherwise have been an impressive approach. The only members of the squad who did not seem the worse for wear were the two *comisarios*, who rode in the van on a pair of magnificent high-stepping horses, obvious descendants of the chargers of Cortes's invading Spaniards, the like of which may often be seen in that part of the Continent. The Saint had had an eye for those horses ever since he spied them a mile and a half away, which was why he was so placidly waiting for the deputation.

He watched them with a detached interest, smoking his cigarette. They were an unkempt and ferocious-looking lot (in Pasala, as in many other Latin countries, Satur-

day night is Gillette night for the general public), and every man of them was armed to somewhere near the teeth with a musket, a revolver, and a sabre. The Saint himself was comparatively weaponless, his entire armoury consisting of a beautifully fashioned little knife, strapped to his left forearm under his sleeve, which he could throw with a deadly swiftness and an unerring aim. He did not approve of firearms, which he considered messy and noisy and barbarous inventions of the devil. Yet the opposition's display of force did not concern him.

His first impression, that the entire police force of Santa Miranda had been sent out to arrest him, proved to be a slight overestimate. There were, as a matter of fact, only ten *guardias* behind the two mounted men in respendent uniforms.

The band came to a bedraggled and slovenly halt a few yards from the veranda, and the *comisarios* dismounted and ascended the short fiight of steps with an imposing clanking of scabbards and spurs. They were moustached and important.

The Saint rose.

"Buenas tardes, señores," he murmured courteously.

"Señor," said the senior *comisario* sternly, unfolding a paper overloaded with official seals, "I regret that I have to trouble a visitor so illustrious, but I am ordered to request your honour to allow your honour to be taken to the *prevención*, in order that in the morning your honour may be brought before the *tribunal* to answer a charge of grievously assaulting the Senñor Shannet."

He replaced the document in his pocket, and bowed extravagantly.

The Saint, with a smile, surpassed the extravagance of the bow.

"Señor polizonte," he said, "I regret that I cannot come."

Now the word *"polizonte,"* while it is understood to mean "policeman," is not the term with which it is advisable to address even an irascible *guardia*—much less a full-blown *comisario*. It brought to an abrupt conclusion the elaborate ceremony in which the *comisario* had been indulging.

He turned, and barked an order; and the escort mounted the steps and ranged themselves along the veranda.

"Arrest him!"

"I cannot stay," said the Saint sadly. 'And I refuse to be arrested. *Adiós, amigos!"*

He faded away—through the open door of the dining

room. The Saint had the knack of making these startlingly abrupt exits without any show of haste, so that he was gone before his audience had realized that he was on his way.

Then the *guardias*, led by the two outraged *comisarios*, followed in a body.

The bungalow was small, with a large veranda in front and a smaller veranda at the back. The three habitable rooms of which it boasted ran through the width of the house, with doors opening onto each veranda. The dining room was the middle room, and it had no windows.

As the *guardias* surged in in pursuit, rifles at the ready, with the *comisarios* waving their revolvers, the Saint reappeared in the doorway that opened onto the back of the veranda. At the same moment the doors to the front veranda were slammed and barred behind them by Archie Sheridan, who had been lying in wait in an adjoining room for that purpose.

The Saint's hands were held above his head, and in each hand was a gleaming round black object.

"*Señores,*" he said persuasively, "I am a peaceful revolutionary, and I cannot be pestered like this. In my hands you see two bombs. If you shoot me, they will fall and explode. If you do not immediately surrender I shall throw them—and, again, they will explode. Is it to be death or glory, boys?"

He spoke the last sentence in English; but he had already said enough in the vernacular to make the situation perfectly plain. The *guardias* paused, irresolute.

Their officers, retiring to a strategic positon in the background from which they could direct operations, urged their men to advance and defy death in the performance of their duty; but the Saint shifted his right hand threateningly, and the *guardias* found the counter-argument more convincing. They threw down their arms; and the *comisarios*, finding themselves alone, followed suit as gracefully as they might.

The Saint ordered the arsenal to be thrown out of the door, and he stepped inside the room and stood aside to allow this to be done. Outside, the guns were collected by Archie Sheridan, and their bolts removed and hurled far away into the bushes of the garden. The cartridges he poured into a large bag, together with the contents of the bandoliers which the Saint ordered his prisoners to discard, for these were required for a certain purpose. Then the Saint re-

turned to the doorway.

"*Hasta la vista!*" he murmured mockingly. "Until we meet again!"

And he hurled the two bleaming round black objects he carried, and a wail of terror went up from the doomed men.

The Saint sprang back, slamming and barring the doors in the face of the panic-stricken stampede; and the two tennis balls, which he had coated with Kelly's providential enamel for the purpose, rebounded off the heads of the cowering *comisarios*, leaving great splashes of paint on the gorgeous uniforms and the gorgeous mustachios of Santa Miranda's Big Two, and went bouncing insolently round the room.

The Saint vaulted over the veranda rail and ran round to the front of the bungalow. Sheridan, his bag of cartridges slung over his shoulder, was already mounted on one of the police horses, and holding the other by the bridle. From inside the dining room could be heard the muffled shouting and cursing of the imprisoned men, and on the panels of the barred doors thundered the battering of their efforts to escape.

The Saint sprang into the saddle.

"*Vamos!*" he cried, and smacked his hand down on the horse's quarters.

The pounding of departing hoofs came to the ears of the men in the locked room, and redoubled the fury of their onslaught on the doors. But the mahogany of which the doors were made was thick and well seasoned, and it was ten minutes before they broke out. And then, on foot and unarmed, there was nothing for them to do but to return to Santa Miranda and confess defeat.

The which they did, collaborating on the way down to invent a thrilling tale of a desperate and perilous battle, in which they had braved a hundred deaths, their heroism availing them naught in the face of Simon Templar's evil cunning. But first, to restore their shattered nerves, they partook freely of three bottles of Sheridan's whisky which they found. And it may be recorded that on this account the next day found them very ill; for, before he left, Archie Sheridan had liberally adulterated the whisky with Epsom salts, in anticipation this very vandalism. But, since *guardia* and *comisario* alike were unfamiliar with the flavour of whisky, they noticed nothing amiss, and went unsuspecting to their hideous fate.

But when they returned to Santa Miranda they said nothing whatever about bombs, wisely deeming that the inclusion of that episode in their story could not but cover them with derision.

Meantime, Simon Templar and Archie Sheridan had galloped neck and neck to Kelly's bungalow, and there Kelly was waiting for them. He had a kitbag already packed with certain articles that the Saint had required, and Simon took the bag and lashed it quickly to the pommel of his saddle.

Sheridan dismounted. The Saint shook hands with him, and took the bridle of the spare horse.

"All will be well," said the Saint blithely. "I feel it in my bones. So long, souls! See you all again soon. Do your stuff—and good luck!"

He clapped his heels to his horse, and was gone with a cheery wave of his hand.

They watched him till the trees hid him from view, and then they went back to the bungalow.

"A piece of wood, pliers, screwdriver, and wire, Kelly, my bhoy!" ordered Sheridan briskly. "I've got some work to do before I go to bed tonight. And while I'm doing it you can gather round and hear the biggest laugh yet in this revolution, or how the Battle of Santa Miranda was nearly won on the courts of Wimbledon."

"I thought you weren't coming back," said the girl accusingly.

"I didn't know whether I was or not," answered the shameless Archie. "It all depended on whether the Saint's plan of escape functioned or not. Anyway, a good-bye like you gave me was far too good to miss just because I might be coming back. And don't look so disappointed because I got away. I'll go down to the town and surrender, if that's what you want."

Towards sundown a squadron of cavalry galloped up to the bungalow, and the officer in comand declared his intention of making a search. Kelly protested.

"You have no right, he said, restraining an almost irresistible desire to throw the man down the steps and thus precipitate the fighting that his fists were itching for.

"I have a warrant from the Minister of the Interior, El Supremo é Illustrisimo Señor Manuel Concepsion de Villega," said the officer, producing the document with a flourish.

"El Disgustado y Horribilisimon Señor!" muttered Kelly.

The officer shrugged, and indicated the men who waited below.

"I do not wish to use force, Señor Kelly," he said significantly, and Kelly submitted to the inevitable.

"But," he said, "I do not know why you should suspect me to be hiding him."

"You are known to be a friend of the Señor Sheridan," was the brief reply, "and the Señor Sheridan," is a friend of this man. We are looking for both of them."

Kelly followed the officer into the house.

"What did you say was the name of this man you are looking for?" he inquired.

"To the Señor Shannet, whom he attacked,' said the officer, "he gave his name as Benito Mussolini."

He was at a loss to understand Kelly's sudden earthquaking roar of laughter. At last he gave up the effort, and put it down to another manifestation of the well-known madness of all *ingleses*. But the fact remains that the joke largely compensated Kelly for the indignity of the search to which his house was subjected.

The officer and half a dozen of his men went through the bungalow with a small-toothed comb, and not a cubic inch of it, from floor to rafters, escaped their attention. But they did not find Archie Sheridan, who was sitting out on the roof, on the opposite side to that from which the soldiers had approached.

At last the search party allowed themselves to be shepherded out, for barely an hour's daylight was left to them, and they had already fruitlessly wasted much valuable time.

"But remember, Señor Kelly," said the officer, as his horse was led up, "that both Sheridan and Mussolini have been declared outlaws for resisting arrest and assaulting and threatening the lives of the *guardia civiles* sent to apprehend them. In the morning they will be proclaimed; and the Señor Shannet, who has heard of the insolence offered to the Law, has himself offered to double the reward for their capture, dead or alive."

The troopers rode off on their quest, but in those latitudes the twilight is short. They scoured the countryside for an hour, until the fall of night put an end to the search, and five miles away they found the horses of the two *comisarios* grazing in a field, but of the man Mussolini there was no trace. The Saint had had a good start; and what he did not know about

the art of taking cover in the open country wasn't worth knowing.

He was stretched out on a branch of a tall tree a mile away from where the horses were found when the troop of cavalry reined in only twelve feet beneath him.

"We can do no more now," said the officer. "In the morning we shall find him. Without horses he cannot travel far. Let us go home."

The Saint laughed noiselessly in the darkness.

That night there came into Santa Miranda a *peón*.

He was dirty and disreputable to look upon. His clothes were dusty, patched in many places, and threadbare where they were not patched; and his hair was long, and matted into a permanent thatch, as is the slovenly custom of the labourers of that country.

Had he wished to do so, he might have passed unnoticed among many other similarly down-at-heel and poverty-stricken people; but this he did not seem to want. In fact, he went out of his way to draw attention to himself; and this he found easy enough, for his poverty-stricken appearance was belied by the depth of his pocket.

He made a fairly comprehensive round of the inferior cafés in the town, and in each he bought wine and *aguardiente* for all who cared to join him. Naturally, it was not long before he acquired a large following; and, since he seemed to account for two drinks to everybody else's one, there was no surprise when he became more and more drunk as the evening wore on.

It was not to be expected that such display of affluence on the part of one whose outward aspect argued against the probability that he would have more than a few *centavos* to his name could escape comment, and it was not long before the tongues that devoured the liquor which he bought were busy with rumour. It was whispered, as with authority, that he was a bandit from the Sierra Maduro, over the border beyond Esperanza, who had crossed into Pasala to spend his money and rest until the *rurales* of Maduro tired of seeking him and he could return to his old hunting grounds with safety. Then it was remarked that on his little finger was a signet ring bearing a heraldic device, and with equal authority it was said that he was the heir to a noble Mexican family indulging his hobby of

moving among the *peones* as one of themselves and distributing charity where he found it merited. Against this, another school of thought affirmed that he was a *peón* who had murdered his master and stolen his ring and his money.

The *peón* heard these whisperings and laughingly ignored them. His manner lent more support, however, to either of the two former theories than to the third. He was tall for a *peón*, and a man of great strength, as was seen when he bought a whole keg of wine and lifted it in his hands to fill his goblet as if it had weighed nothing at all. His eyes were blue, which argued that he was of noble descent, for the true *peón* stock is so mixed with the native that the eyes of that sea-blue colour are rare. And again, the bandit theory was made more plausible by the man's boisterous and reckless manner, as though he held life cheap and the intense enjoyment of the day the only thing of moment, and would as soon be fighting as drinking. He had, too, a repertoire of strange and barbarous songs which no one could understand.

"Drink up, *amigos!*" he roared from time to time, "for this is the beginning of great days for Pasala!"

But when they asked him what they might mean, he turned away their questions with a jest, and called for more wine.

Few of his following had seen such a night for many years.

From house to house he went, singing his strange songs, and bearing his keg of wine on his shoulder. One or two *guardias* would have barred his way, or, hearing the rumours which were gossiped about him, would have stopped and questioned him; but the *peón* poured them wine or flung them money, and they stood aside.

Towards midnight, still singing, the man led his procession up the Calle del Palacio. The crowd followed, not sure where they were going, and not caring, for they had drunk much.

Now, the Calle del Palacio forms the upright of the T which has been described, and halfway down it, as has been stated, is the palace from which it takes its name.

In the street opposite the palace gates the *peón* halted, set down his keg, and mounted unsteadily upon it. He stood there, swaying slightly, and his following gathered round him.

"*Viva! Viva!*" they shouted

thickly.

The *peón* raised his hands for silence.

"Citizens!" he cried, "I have told you that this is the beginning of great days for Pasala, and now I will tell you why. It is because at last we are going to suffer no more under this Manuel Concepcion de Villega. May worms devour him alive, for he is a thief and a tyrant and the son of a dog! His taxes bear you down, and you receive nothing in return. The President is his servant, that strutting nincompoop, and they are both in the pay of the traitor Shannet, who is planning to betray you to Maduro. Now I say that we will end this to-night."

"Viva!" responded a few doubtful voices.

"Let us finish this slavery," cried the *peón* again. "Let us storm this palace, which was built with money wrung from the poor, where your puppet of a President and this pig of a De Villega sleep in luxury for which you have been tortured! Let us tear them from their beds and slay them, and cast them back into the gutter from which they came!"

This time there were no *"Vivas!"* The awfulness of the stranger's blasphemy had sobered the mob as nothing else could have done. It was unprecedented — incredible. No one had ever dared to speak in such terms of the President and his minister— or, if they had, it was reported by spies to the *comisarios*, and *guardias* came swiftly and took the blasphemers away to a place where their treason should not offend the ears of the faithful. Of course, the *peón* had spoken nothing but the truth. But to tear down the palace and kill the President! It was unheard of. It could not be done without much discussion.

The stranger, after his first speech, had seen the sentries at the palace gates creep stealthily away; and now, over the heads of the awestruck crowd, he saw a little knot of *guardias* coming down the street at the double. Whistles shrilled, and the mob huddled together in sudden terror.

"Amigos," said the stranger urgently, in a lower voice, "the hour of liberation will not be long coming. Tonight you have heard me sing many strange songs, which are the songs of freedom. Now, when you hear those songs again, and you have thought upon the words I have said to-night, follow the man who sings such songs as I sang, for he will be sent to lead you to victory. But now go quickly, or

you will be taken and punished."

The mob needed no encouragement for that. Even while the *peón* spoke many of them had sneaked away into the dark side streets. As he spoke his last sentence, it was as if a cord had been snapped which held them, and they fled incontinently.

The *peón* straightened up and shook his fists at their backs.

"F o o l s !" h e screamed. "Cowards! Curs! Is it thus that ye fight? Is it thus that ye overthrow tryrants?"

But his audience was gone, and from either side the *guardias* were closing in on him with drawn sabres.

"*Guarro!*" challenged one of them. "What is this raving?"

"I speak for liberty!" bawled the *p e ó n*, reeling drunkenly on his pedestal. "I speak against the President, who does not know the name of his father, and against the Minister of the Interior, Manuel Concepcion de Villega, whom I call Señor Jugo Procedente del Estercolero, the spawn of a dunghill—*guarros, perruelos, hijos de la puta adiva. . . .*"

He let loose a stream of the vilest profanity and abuse in the language, so that even the hardened *guardias* were horrified.

They dragged him down and hustled him ungently to the police station, where they locked him up in a verminous cell for the night; but even then he cursed and raved against the President and the Minister o f t h e Interior, mingling h i s maledictions with snatches of unintelligible songs, until the jailer threatened to beat him unless he held his tongue. Then he was silent, and presently went to sleep.

In t h e m o r n i n g they brought him before the magistrate. He was sober, but still rebellious. They asked him his name.

"Don Fulano de Tal," he replied, which is the Spanish equivalent of saying "Mr. So-and-So, Such-and-Such."

"If you are impertinent," said the magistrate, "I shall order you to receive a hundred lashes.'

"My name is Sancho Quijote," said the *peón* sullenly.

He was charged, and the sentries from the palace testified to the treason of his speeches. So also did the *guardias* who had broken up his meeting. They admitted, in extenuation of his offense, that he had been very drunk.

He was asked if he had anything to say.

"I have nothing to say," he

answered, "except that, drunk or not, I shall spit upon the names of the President and the Minister of the Interior till the end of my days. As for you, *señor juez*, you are no better than the *guindillas* who arrested me—you are all the miserable hirelings of the oppressors, paid to persecute those who dare speak for justice. But it will not be long before your pride is turned to humiliation."

"He is mad," whispered one *guardia* to another.

The *peón* was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment with hard labour, for there are no limits to the powers of summary jurisdiction in Pasala. He heard the verdict without emotion.

"It does not matter," he said. "I shall not stay in prison seven days. It will not be long before you know why."

When he reached the prison he asked to be allowed to send a message by telegraph to Ondia, the capital of Maduro.

"I am of Maduro,' he confessed. "I should have returned to Ondia to-morrow, and I must tell my wife that I am detained."

He had money to pay for the telegram, but it was evening before permission was received for the message to be sent, for nothing is done hurriedly in Spanish America.

Twenty-four hours later came from Ondia a telegram addressed to Manuel Concepcion de Villega, and it was signed with the name and titles of the President of Maduro. A free translation would have read:

I am informed that a citizen of Maduro, giving the name of Sancho Quijote, has been imprisoned in Santa Miranda. If he is not delivered to the frontier by Wednesday noon my armies will advance into Pasala.

Shannet was closeted with De Villega when the message arrived, and for the moment he was no better able to account for it than was the Minister.

"Who is this man Quijote?" he asked. "It's a ridiculous name. Here is a book called *Don Quijote*, Quixote in English, and there is a man in it called Sancho Panza."

"I know that," said Don Manuel, and sent for the judge.

He heard the story of the *peón's* crime and sentence and was not enlightened. But he had enough presence of mind to accuse the magistrate of inefficiency for not having suspected that the name Sancho Quijote was a false one.

"It is impossible," said De

Villega helplessly, when the magistrate had been dismissed. "By Wednesday noon —that hardly gives us enough time to get him to the frontier even if we release him immediately. And who is this man? A labourer, a stranger, of whom nobody knows anything, who suddenly appears in Santa Miranda with more money than he could have ever come by honestly, and preaches a revolution to a mob that he has first made drunk. He deserves his punishment, and yet the President of Maduro, without any inquiry, demands his release. It means war."

"He knew this would happen," said Shannet. "The judge told us,—he boasted that he would not stay in prison seven days."

They both saw the light at the same instant.

"*An agent provocateur*—"

"A trap!" snarled De Villega. "And we have fallen into it. It is only an excuse that Maduro was seeking. They sent him here, with money, for no other purpose than to get himself arrested. And then this preposterous ultimatum, which they give us no time even to consider. . . ."

"But why make such an intrigue?" demanded Shannet. "This is a poor country. They are rich. They have nothing to gain."

Don Manuel tugged nervously at his mustachios.

"And we cannot even buy them off,' he said. "Unless we appeal to the *Estados Unidos* ——"

Shannet sneered.

"And before their help can arrive the war is over," he said. "New Orleans is five days away. But they will charge a high price for burying the hatchet for us."

Don Manuel suddenly sat still. His shifty little dark eyes came to rest on Shannet.

"I see it!" he exclaimed savagely. "It is the oil! You, and your accursed oil! I see it all! It is because of the oil that this country is always embroiled in a dozen wars and fears of wars. So far Pasala has escaped, but now we are like the rest. My ministry will be overthrown. Who knows what Great Power has paid Maduro to attack us? Then the Great Power steps in and takes our oil from us. I shall be exiled. Just now it is England, through you, who has control of the oil. Perhaps it is now America who tries to capture it, or another English company. I am ruined!"

"Fod God's sake stop whining!" snapped Shannet. "If you're ruined, so am I! We've got to see what can be done about it."

De Villega shook his head.

"There is nothing to do. They are ten to one. We shall be beaten. But I have some money, and there is a steamer in two days. If we can hold off their armies so long I can escape."

It was some time before the more brutally vigorous Shannet could bring the minister to reason. Shannet had the courage of the wild beast that he was. At bay, faced with the wrecking of his tainted fortunes, he had no other idea but to fight back with the desperate ferocity of a cornered animal.

But even when Don Manuel's moaning had been temporarily quietened they were little better off. It was useless to appeal to the President, for he was no more than a tool in De Villega's hands. Likewise, the rest of the Council were nothing but figureheads, the mere instruments of De Villega's policy, and appointed by himself for no other reason than their willingness, for a consideration, to oppose nothing that he put forward.

"There is but one chance," said De Villega. "A *radiógrafo* must be sent to New Orleans. America will send a warship to keep the peace. Then we will try to make out to Maduro that the warship is here to fight for us, and their armies will retire. To the *Estados Unidos*, then, we will say that we had made peace before their warship arrived; we are sorry to have troubled them, but there is nothing to do."

It seemed a flimsy suggestion to Shannet, but it was typical of De Villega's crafty and tortuous statesmanship. Shannet doubted if America, having once been asked to intervene, would be so easily put off, but he had no more practicable scheme to suggest himself, and he let it go.

He could not support it with enthusiasm, for an American occupation would mean the coming of American justice, and Shannet had no wish for that while there were still tongues wagging with charges against himself. But he could see no way out. He was in a cleft stick.

"Why not let this *peón* go?" he asked.

"And will that help us?" demanded Don Manuel scornfully. "If we sent him away now he would hardly have time to reach the border by noon to-morrow, and they would certainly say that they had not received him. Is it not plain that they are determined to fight? When they have taken such pains to trump up an excuse, will they be so quickly appeased?"

A purely selfish train of thought led to Shannet's next question.

"This man Sheridan and his friend—has nothing been heard of them yet? They have been at large two days."

"At a time like this, can I be bothered with such trifles?" replied De Villega shortly. "The squadron of Captain Tomare has been looking for them, but they are not found."

This was not surprising, for the searchers had worked outwards from Santa Miranda. Had they been inspired to work inwards they might have found Simon Templar, unwashed and unshaven, breaking stones in their own prison yard, chained by his ankles in a line of other unwashed and unshaven desperadoes, his identity lost in his official designation of Convicto Sancho Quijote, No. 475.

It was the Saint's first experience of imprisonment with hard labour, and he would have been enjoying the novel adventure if it had not been for various forms of microscopic animal life with which the prison abounded.

There came one morning to the London offices of Pasala Oil Products, Ltd. (Managing Director, Hugo Campard), a cable in code. He decoded it himself, for it was not a code in general use; and his pink face went paler as the transliteration proceeded.

By the time the complete translation had been written in between the lines Hugo Campard was a very frightened man. He read the message again and again, incredulous of the catastrophe it foreboded.

Maduro declared war Pasala on impossible ultimatum. Believe deliberately instigated America or rival combine. Pasala army hopelessly outnumbered. No chance. Villega appealed America. Help on way but will mean overthrow of government. Concessions probably endangered. Sell out before news reaches London and breaks market.

SHANNET.

Campard's fat hands trembled as he clipped the end of a cigar.

He was a big, florid man with a bald head and a sandy moustache. Once upon a time he had been a pinched and out-at-elbows clerk in a stockbroker's office, until his ingenuity had found incidental ways of augmenting his income. For a few years he had scraped and saved; then, with five hundred pounds capital, and an intimate knowledge of

the share market, he had gone after bigger game.

He had succeeded. He was clever, he knew the pitfalls to avoid, he was without pity or scruple, and luck had been with him. In fifteen years he had become a very rich man. Innumerable were the companies with which he had been associated, which had taken in much money and paid out none. He had been "exposed" half a dozen times, and every reputable broker knew his stock for what it was; but the scrip of the Campard companies was always most artistically engraved and their prospectuses couched in the most attracive terms, so that there was never a lack of small investors ready to pour their money into his bank account.

It is said that there is a mug born every minute, and Campard had found this a sound w o r k i n g principle. Many others like him, steering narrowly clear of the law, have found no lack of victims, and Campard had perhaps found more suckers than most.

But even the most triumphant career meets a check sometimes, and Campard had made a slip which had brought him into the full publicity of a High Court action. He had wriggled out, by the skin of his teeth and some expensive perjury, but the resultant outcry had told him that it would be wise to lie low for a while. And lying low did not suit Campard's book. He lived extravagantly, and for all the wealth that he possesed on paper there were many liabilities. And then, when his back was actually to the wall, had come the miracle—in the shape of the chance to buy the Pasala concession, offered him by a man named Shannet, whom he had employed many years ago.

Pasala oil was good. In the few months that it had been worked, the quality and quantity of the output had been startling. Campard enlisted the help of a handful of his boon companions, and poured in all his resources. More plant was needed and more labour, more expert management. That was now to be supplied. The directors of Pasala Oil Products sat down to watch themselves become millionaires.

And then, in clear sky, the cloud.

Hugo Campard, skimming through his newspaper on his way to the financial pages, had read of the early manifestations of the Saint, and had been mildly amused. In the days that followed he had read of other exploits of the Saint, and his amusement had changed gradually to grave

anxiety. . . . And one day there had come to Hugo Campard, through the post, a card. . . .

Each morning thereafter the familiar envelope had been beside his plate at breakfast; each morning, when he reached the offices of Pasala Oil Products, he had found another reminder of the Saint on his desk. There had been no message. Just the picture. But the newspapers were full of stories, and Hugo Campard was afraid. . . .

Then, two days ago, the Saint had spoken.

Campard could not have told why he opened the envelopes in which the Saint sent his mementoes. Perhaps it was because, each time, Campard hoped he would be given some indication of what the Saint meant to do. After days of suspense, that had painted the black hollows of sleeplessness under his eyes and brought him to a state of nerves that was sheer physical agony, he was told.

On that day, underneath the crude outline, was pencilled a line of small writing:

In a week's time you will be ruined.

He had already had police protection—after the Lemuel incident there had been no difficulty in obtaining that, as soon as he showed the police the first cards. All night there had been a constable outside his house in St. John's Wood. All day a constable stood in the corridor outside his office. A plain-clothes detective rode in his car with him everywhere he went. Short of some unforeseeable masterpiece of strategy, or a recourse to the machinegun fighting of the Chicago gangsters, it was impossible that the Saint could reach him as he had reached Lemuel.

Now, at one stroke, the Saint brought all these preparations to naught, and broke invisibly through the cordon. Against such an attack the police could not help him.

"In a week's time you will be ruined."

An easy boast to make. A tremendous task to carry out.

And yet, even while he had been racking his brains to find out how the Saint might carry out his threat, he had his answer.

For a long time he stared blindly at the cablegram, until every letter of the message was burned into his brain as with a hot iron. When he roused himself it was to clutch at a straw.

He telephoned to the telegraph company, and verified

that the message had actually been received from Santa Miranda via Barbados and Pernambuco. Even that left a loophole. He cabled to an agent in New York, directing him to obtain authentic information from Washington at any cost; and by the evening he received a reply confirming Shannet's statement. The U.S.S. *Michigan* was on its way to Santa Miranda in response to an appeal from the President.

There was no catch in it. Shannet's code message was not a bluff, not even from an agent of the Saint in Santa Miranda. It was grimly sober utterance of fact.

But the gigantic thoroughness of it! The colossal impudence of the scheme! Campard felt as if all the strength and fight had ebbed out of him. He was aghast at the revelation of the resources of the Saint. Against a man who apparently thought nothing of engineering a war to gain his ends, he felt as puny and helpless as a babe.

His hand went out again to the telephone, but he checked the impulse. It was no use telling the police *that*. They could do nothing—and, far too soon as it was, the news would be published in the press. And then, with the name of Campard behind them, P.O.P. shares would tumble down the market to barely the value of their weight in waste paper.

Before he left the office that night he sent a return code in cable to Santa Miranda:

Believe war organized by criminal known as Saint, who has threatened me. Obtain particular of any strange Englishman in Pasala or Maduro. Give descriptions. Report developments.

What the Saint had started, Campard argued, the Saint could stop. Campard might have a chance yet, if he could bargain. . . .

But the declaration of war was announced in the evening paper which he bought on his way home, and Hugo Campard knew then it was too late.

He had no sleep that night, and by nine o'clock next morning he was at the office, and speaking on the telephone to his broker.

"I want you to sell twenty thousand P.O.P.s for me," he said. "Take the best price you can get."

"I wish I could hope to get a price at all," came the sardonic answer. "The market's full of rumours and everyone's scared to touch the things. You're too late with

your selling—the bears were in before you."

"What do you mean?" asked Campard in a strained voice.

"There was a good deal of quiet selling yesterday and the day before," said the broker. "Somebody must have had information. Theyre covering to-day, and they must have made thousands."

During the morning other backers of the company came through on the telephone and were accusing or whining according to temperament, and Campard dealt with them all in the same formula.

"I can't help it," he said. "I'm hit twice as badly as any of you. It isn't my fault. The company was perfectly straight; you know that."

The broker rang up after lunch to say that he had managed to get rid of six thousand shares at an average price of two shillings.

"Two shillings for two-pound shares?" Campard almost sobbed. "You're mad!"

"See if you can do any better yourself, Mr. Campard," replied the broker coldly. "The market won't take any more at present, but I might be able to get rid of another couple of thousand before we close at about a bob each—to people who want to keep them as curios. A firm of wall-paper manufacturers might make an offer for the rest——"

Campard slammed down the receiver and buried his face in his hands.

He was in the same position three hours later when his secretary knocked on the door and entered with a buff envelope.

"Another cable, Mr. Campard."

He extracted the flimsy and reached out a nerveless hand for the code book.

He decoded:

Maduro armies advancing into Pasala. Only chance now sell any price. Answer inquiry. Man arrived nearly four months ago——

With a sudden impatience, Campard tore the cablegram into a hundred pieces and dropped them into the waste-paper basket. There was no time now to get in touch with the Saint. The damage was done.

A few minutes later came the anticipated message from the firm that he had induced to back him over Pasala Oil Products. Rich as he had become, he would never have been able to acquire his large holding in the company without assistance. How, with his reputation, he had got any firm to back him was a mys-

tery. But he had been able to do it on the system known as "margins"—which, in this instance, meant roughly that he could be called upon immediately to produce fifty percent of the amount by which the shares had depreciated, in order to "keep up his margin."

The demand, courteously but peremptorily worded, was delivered by special messenger, and his only surprise was that it had not come sooner. He scribbled a check, which there was no money in the bank to meet, and sent it back by the same boy.

He sent for his car and left the office shortly afterwards. The paper which he bought outside told of the panic of P.O.P.s, and he read the article with a kind of morbid interest.

There was a letter, delivered by the afternoon post, waiting at his house when he got back.

I sold P.O.P. and covered to-day. The profits are nearly twelve thousand pounds.

The expenses of this campaign have been unusually heavy; but, even then, after deducting these and my ten percent collecting fee, I hope to be able to forward nine thousand pounds to charity on your behalf.

RECEIVED *the above-named sum—with thanks.*

THE SAINT

Enclosed was a familiar card, and one Pasala Oil Products share certificate.

Hugo Campard dined well that night, and, alone, accounted for a bottle of champagne. After that he smoked a cigar with relish, and drank a liqueur brandy with enjoyment.

He had dressed. He felt the occasion deserved it. His mind was clear and untroubled, for in a flash he had seen the way out of the trap.

When his cigar was finished, he exchanged his coat for a dressing gown, and passed into his study. He locked the door behind him, and for some time paced up and down the room in silence, but no one will ever know what he thought. At ten o'clock precisely the pacing stopped.

The constable on guard outside heard the shot; but Hugo Campard did not hear it.

The men serving sentences of hard labour in the prison of Santa Miranda are allowed an afternoon siesta of three hours. This is not due to the humanity and loving-kindness of the authorities, but to the fact that nothing will induce

the warders to forego the afternoon naps which is the custom of the country, and no one has yet discovered a way of making the prisoners work without a wideawake warder to watch them and pounce on the shirkers.

The fetters are struck off the prisoners' ankles, and they are herded into their cells, a dozen in each, and there locked up to rest as well as they can in the stifling heat of a room ventilated only by one small barred window and thickly populated with flies. The warders retire to their quarters above the prison, and one jailer is left on guard, nodding in the passage outside the cells, with a rifle across his knees.

It was so on the third day of the Saint's incarceration, and this was the second hour of the siesta, but the Saint had not slept.

His cell mates were sprawled on the bunks or on the floor, snoring heavily. They were hardened to the flies. Outside, the jailer dozed, his sombrero on the back of his head and his coat unbuttoned. Through the window of the cell a shaft of burning sunlight cut across the moist gloom and splashed a square of light on the opposite wall.

The Saint sat by the gates of the cell, watching that creeping square of light. Each afternoon he had watched it, learning its habits, so that now he could tell the time by it. When the edge of the square touched a certain scar in the stone it was four o'clock. . . . That was the time he had decided upon. . . .

He scrambled softly to his feet.

The jailer's head nodded lower and lower. Every afternoon, the Saint had noted, he set his chair at a certain point in the passage where a cool draught from a cross-corridor would fan him. Therefore, on that afternoon, the Saint had taken pains to get into the nearest cell to that point.

He tore a button off his clothes, and threw it. It hit the jailer on the cheek, and the man stirred and grunted. The Saint threw another button. The man shook his head, snorted, and roused, stretching his arms with a prodigious yawn.

"*Señor!*" hissed the Saint.

The man turned his head.

"Loathsome disease," he growled, "why dost thou disturb my meditations? Lie down and be silent, lest I come and beat thee."

"I only wished to ask your honour if I might give your honour a present of fifty

pesos," said the Saint humbly.

He squatted down again by the bars of the gate and played with a piece of straw. Minutes passed. . . .

He heard the jailer get to his feet, but did not look up. The man's footsteps grated on the floor and stopped by the cell door. In the cell the other convicts snored peacefully.

"Eater of filth and decomposing fish," said the jailer's voice gruffly, "did I hear thy coarse lips speak to me of fifty *pesos?* How hast thou come by that money?"

"Gifts break rocks," replied the *peón,* quoting the Spanish proverb. "I had rather my gifts broke them than I were compelled to break any more of them. I have fifty *pesos,* and I want to escape."

"It is impossible. I searched thee——"

"It was hidden. I will give it to your honour as a pledge. I know where to find much more money, if your honour would deign to release me and let me lead you to where it is hidden. Have you not heard how, when I was arrested, it was testified that in the town I spent, in one evening, enough to keep you for a year? That was nothing to me. I am rich."

The jailer stroked his stubbly chin.

"Verminous mongrel," he said, more amiably, "show me this fifty *pesos* and I will believe thee."

The Saint ran his fingers through his tangled hair, and there fell out a note. The jailer recognized it, and his avaricious eyes gleamed.

He reached a claw-like hand through the bars, but the Saint jerked the note out of his reach. The jailer's face darkened.

"Abominable insect," he said, "thou hast no right to that. Thou art a convict, and thy goods are forfeit to the State. As the servant of the State I will confiscate that paper, that thy low-born hands may defile it no longer."

He reached for his keys, but the Saint held up a warning hand.

"If you try to do that, *amigo,*" he said, "I shall cry out so loudly that the other warders will come down to see what has happened. Then I shall tell them, and they will make you divide the fifty *pesos* with them. And I shall refuse to tell you where I have hidden the rest of my money. Why not release me, and have it all for yourself?"

"But how shall I know that thou dost not lie?"

The Saint's hands went again to his hair, and a rain of fifty-*peso* notes fell to the floor. He picked them up and

counted them before the jailer. There were thirty of them altogether.

"See, I have them here!" he said. "Fifteen hundred *pesos* is a lot of money. Now open this door and I will give them to you."

The jailer's eyes narrowed cunningly. Did this fool of a *peón* really believe that he would be given his liberty in exchange for such a paltry sum? Apparently.

Not that the sum was so paltry, being equal to about two hundred pounds in English money; but if any prisoner escaped, the jailer would be blamed for it, and probably imprisoned himself. Yet this simpleton seemed to imagine that he had only to hand over his bribe and the jailer would risk punishment to earn it.

Very well, let him have his childish belief. It would be easily settled. The door opened, the money paid over, a shot. . . . And then there would be no one to bear witness against him. The prisoner was known to be violent. He had attempted to escape, and was shot. It would be easy to invent a story to account for the opening of the cell door. . . .

"*Señor peón,*" said the jailer, "I see now that your honour should not be herded in with these cattle. I will set your honour free, and your honour will give me the money, and I shall remember your honour in my prayers."

He tiptoed back to his chair and picked up his rifle. Then, with elaborate precautions against noise, he unlocked the cell door, and the *peón* came out into the passage.

The other prisoners still snored, and there was no sound but the droning of the flies to arouse them. The whole colloquy had been conducted in whispers, for it was imperative for the jailer as for the *peón* that there should be no premature alarm.

"Now give me the money," said the jailer huskily.

The Saint held out the handful of notes, and one broke loose and fluttered to the floor. As the jailer bent to pick it up, the Saint reached over him and slid the man's knife gently out of his belt. As the man straightened up the Saint's arm whipped round his neck, strangling his cry of fear before it could pass his throat. And the man felt the point of the knife prick his chest.

"Put thy rifle down against the wall," breathed the Saint in his ear. "If it makes a sound thou wilt not speak again."

No rifle could ever have been grounded more silently.

The Saint withdrew the knife and picked the man off his feet. In an instant, and without a sound, he had him on the floor, holding him with his legs in a jiu-jitsu lock so that he could not move.

"Be very quiet," urged the Saint, and let him feel the knife again.

The man lay like one dead. The Saint, his hands now free, twisted the man's arms behind his back and tied them with the sling of his rifle. Then he rolled the man over.

"When you searched me," he said, "I had a knife. Where is it?"

"I am wearing it."

The Saint rolled up the mans sleeve and unstrapped the sheath from his forearm. With loving care he transferred it to his own arm, for he had had Anna for years, and she was the darling of his heart. That little throwing-knife, which he could wield so expertly, had accompanied him through countless adventures, and had saved his life many times. He loved it like a child, and the loss of it would have left him inconsolable.

With Anna back in her place, the Saint felt more like himself—though it is doubtful if anyone could have been found to agree with him, for he could never in his life have looked so dirty and disreputable as he was then. He, Simon Templar, the Saint, the man who was known for his invariable elegance and his almost supernatural power of remaining immaculate and faultlessly groomed even in the most hectic rough-house and the most uncivilized parts of the world, had neither washed nor shaved for nearly four days. There was no provision for these luxuries in the prison of Santa Miranda. And his clothes had been dreadful enough when Kelly had borrowed them off his undergardener for the purpose; now, after having been lived in day and night on the stone pile and in the filthy cell which they had just left, their condition may be imagined....

His greatest wish at that moment was to get near some soap and water; and already the time of grace for such a diversion was getting short. The square of light on the cell wall told him that he had barely half an hour at his disposal before Santa Miranda would be rousing itself for the second instalment of its day's work; and the other warders would soon be lurching down, yawning and cursing, to drive the prisoners back to their toil. It was time for the Saint to be moving.

He unfastened the jailer's

belt and used it to secure the man's legs; then he rolled him over and stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth for a gag. He straightened up, hands on hips; and the helpless man glared up at him with bulging eyes.

"But I had forgotten!" cried the Saint, under his breath, and stooped again to take his money from the jailer's pocket.

The man squirmed, and the Saint swept him a mocking bow.

"Remain with God, my little ape," he murmured. "There will now be nothing to disturb thy meditations."

Then he was gone.

He ran lightly down the corridor and out at the end into the blazing sunlight of the prison courtyard. This he crossed swiftly, slowing up and moving a little more cautiously as he neared the gates. Within the courtyard, beside the gates, was a little sentry box where the gatekeeper might take shelter from the sun.

The Saint stole up the last few yards on tiptoe, and sidled one eye round the doorway of the box.

The gatekeeper sat inside on a packing case, his back propped against the wall. His rifle was leaning against the wall in one corner. He was awake, but his eyes were intent on a pattern which he was tracing in the dust with the toe of his boot.

The bare prison walls were too high to scale, and the only way out was by way of the gates.

The Saint's shadow suddenly blocked the light from the sentry box, and the gatekeeper half rose to his feet with a shout rising to his lips. It was rather like shooting a sitting rabbit, but the issues involved were too great to allow of making a more sporting fight of it. As the warder's head came up, the Saint hit him on the point of the jaw scientifically and with vim, and the shout died stillborn.

The Saint huddled the man back against the wall and tipped his sombrero over his eyes as if he were asleep—which, in fact, he was. Then he scrambled over the gates, and dropped cat-footed into the dust of the cart track of a road outside.

The prison of Santa Miranda lies to the east of the town, near the sea, among the slums which closely beset the bright main streets; and the Saint set himself to pass quickly through the town by way of these dirty, narrow streets where his disreputable condition would be most unno-

ticed, avoiding the Calle del Palacio and the chance of encountering a *guardia* who might remember him.

Santa Miranda had not yet awoken. In the grass-grown lanes between the rude huts of the labourers a child in rags played here and there, but paid no attention to his passing. In the doorway of one hut an old and wizened Indian slept in the sun, like a lizard. The Saint saw no one else.

He threaded the maze quietly but with speed, steering a course parallel to the Calle del Palacio. And then, over the low roofs of the adobe hovels around him, he saw, quite close, a tall white tower caught by the slanting rays of the sun, and he changed his plans.

That is to say, he resolved on the spur of the moment to dispense with making plans. His original vague idea had been to make for Kelly's bungalow, get a shave, a bath, some clean clothes, and a cigarette, and sit down to deliberate the best way of capturing the town. So far, in spite of his boast, the solution of that problem had eluded him, though he had no doubts that he would be given inspiration at the appointed time.

Now, looking at that tower, which he knew to be an ornament of the Presidential Palace, only a stones throw away, the required inspiration came; and he acted upon it at once, branching off to his left in the direction of the tower.

It was one of those gay and reckless, daredevil and foolhardy, utterly preposterous and wholly delightful impulses which the Saint could never resist. The breath-taking impudence of it was, to his way of thinking, the chief reason for taking it seriously; the suicidal odds against success were a conclusive argument for having a fling at bringing off the lone hundred-to-one chance; the monumental nerve that was plainly needed for turning the entertaining idea into a solemn fact was a challenge to his adventurousness that it was simply unthinkable to ignore. The Saint took up the gauntlet without the faintest hesitation.

For this was the full effrontery of his decision:

"Eventually," whispered the Saint, to his secret soul—"why not now?"

And the Saintly smile in all its glory twitched his lips back from his white teeth. . . .

His luck had been stupendous, and it augured well for the future. Decidedly it was his day. A clean get-away from the prison, with no alarm. And he reached the

high wall surrounding the palace grounds unobserved. And only a dozen feet way from the walls grew a tall tree.

The Saint went up the tree like a monkey, to a big straight branch that stuck out horizontally fifteen feet from the ground. Measuring the distance, he jumped.

The leap took him onto the top of the wall. He steadied himself for a moment, and then jumped again, twelve feet down into the palace gardens.

He landed on his toes, as lightly as a panther, and went zigzagging over the lawn between the flower beds like a Red Indian. The gardens were empty. There was no sound but the murmuring of bees in the sun and the soft rustle of the Saint's feet over the grass.

He ran across the deserted gardens and up some steps to a flagged terrace in the very shadow of the palace walls. Eight feet above the terrace hung a low balcony. The Saint took two steps and a jump, hung by his fingertips for a second, and pulled himself quickly up and over the balustrade.

An open door faced him, and the room beyond was empty. The Saint walked in, and passed through to the corridor on the other side.

Here he was at a loss, for the geography of the palace was strange to him. He crept along, rather hesitantly, without a sound. In the space of a dozen yards there was another open door. Through it, as he passed, the Saint caught a glimpse of the room beyond, and what he saw brought him to a sudden standstill.

He tiptoed back to the doorway and stood there at gaze.

It was a bathroom.

Only a year ago that bathroom had been fitted up at enormous cost for the delectation of the Saturday nights of his excellency the President and the Minister of the Interior. A gang of workmen specially sent down by a New York firm of contractors had affixed those beautiful sky-blue tiles to the walls, and laid those lovely seagreen tiles on the floor, and installed that superlative pale green porcelain bath with its gleaming silver taps and showers and other gadgets. Paris had supplied the great crystal jar of bath salts which stood on the window sill, and the new cakes of expensive soap in the dishes.

The Saint's glistening eyes swept the room.

It was not Saturday, but it seemed as if someone were making a departure from the usual habits of the palace

household. On a rack above the wash basin were laid out razor, shaving soap, and brush. On a chair beside the bath were snowy towels. On another chair, in a corner, were clothes—a spotless silk shirt, a sash, widebottomed Mexican trousers braided with gold, shoes. . . .

For a full minute the Saint stared, struck dumb with wonder at his astounding good fortune. Then, in fear and trembling, he stole into the room and turned on a tap.

The water ran hot.

He hesitated no longer. War, revolution, battle, murder, and sudden death meant nothing to him then. He closed the door, and turned the key.

Blessings, like misfortunes, never come singly. There was even a packet of Havana cigarettes and a box of matches tucked away behind the bath salts. . . .

Ten minutes later, already shaved, the Saint was stretched full length in a steaming bath into which he had emptied the best part of the Presidential jar of bath salts, innocently playing submarines with the sponge and a cake of soap.

A cigarette was canted jauntily up between his lips, and he was without a care in the world.

Archie Sheridan mopped his moist forehead and smacked viciously at a mosquito which was gorging itself on his bare forearm.

"Thank the Lord you're back," he said. "This blistered place gives me the creeps. Have you fixed anything?"

Kelly settled ponderously on the spread ground sheet.

"I have arranged the invadin' army,' he said. "Anything come through while I've been away?"

"Nothing that matters. One or two private messages, which I duly acknowledged. I wonder what they're thinking at the Ondia end of the line."

"There'll be a breakdown gang along sometime," pronounced Kelly. "It's now the second day of the wire bein' cut. Within the week, maybe, they'll wake up and send to repair it. What's the time?"

Sheridan consulted his watch.

"A quarter-past eleven," he said.

They sat under a great tree, in a small clearing in the jungle near the borders of Maduro, some ten miles east of Esperanza. A mile away was the rough track which led from Esperanza across the frontier to Maduro, and which formed the only road link between the two countries; and

there Kelly's Ford, in which they had made most of the journey, waited hidden between the trees at a little distance from the road.

But for all the evidence there was to the contrary they might have been a thousand miles from civilization. At the edge of the tiny clearing colossal trees laced together with vines and creepers hemmed them in as with a gigantic palisade; high over their heads the entangled branches of the trees shut out the sky, and allowed no light to pass but a ghostly, gray twilight, in which the glaring crimsons and oranges and purples of the tropical blooms which flowered here and there in the marshy soil stood out with a shrieking violence.

Now and again, in the stillness of the great forest, there would be a rustle of the passing of some unseen wild thing. Under some prowling beast's paw, perhaps, a rotten twig would snap with a report like a rifle shot. Sometimes the delirious chattering of a troop of monkeys would babble out with a startling shrillness that would have sent a shudder up the spine of an impressionable man. And the intervals of silence were not true silence, but rather a dim and indefinable and monotonous murmur punctuated with the sogging sound of dripping water. The air was hot and steamy and heavy with sickly perfumes.

"You get used to it," said Kelly with a comprehensive wave of the stem of his pipe.

"Thanks," said Sheridan. "I'm not keen to. I've been here two days too long already. I have nightmares in which I'm sitting in an enormous bath, but as soon as I've finished washing a shower of mud falls on me and I have to start all over again."

Now this was on the morning of the day in the afternoon of which the Saint escaped from prison.

On Sheridan's head were a pair of radio headphones. On the ground sheet beside him was a little instrument, a Morse transmitter, which he had ingeniously fashioned before they left Santa Miranda. Insulated wires trailed away from him into the woods.

The telegraph line, for most of its length, followed the roads, but at that point, for some inexplicable reason, it took a short cut across country. They had decided to attack it at that point on grounds of prudence; for, although the road between Esperanza and the Maduro frontier was not much used, there was always the risk of someone passing and com-

menting on their presence when he reached his destination.

The afternoon before, they had cut the line and sent through to Esperanza, to be relayed to Santa Miranda, the utimatum purporting to come from the President of Maduro. Since then, night and day, one of them had sat with the receivers upon his ears, waiting for a reply. The arrangement was complicated, for Kelly could not read Morse, while Sheridan's Spanish was very haphazard; but they managed somehow. Several times when Archie had been resting Kelly had roused him to take down a message; but the translation had had no bearing on the threat of war, except occasionally from a purely private and commercial aspect. There had been no official answer.

Sheridan looked at his watch again.

"Their time's up in half an hour," he said. "What do you say to sending a final demand?—the 'D' being loud and explosive, as in 'Income Tax.'"

"Shure — if there's no chance of 'em surrenderin'," agreed Kelly. "But we can't let anything stop the war."

The message they sent was worded with this in view:

Understand you refuse to release Quijote. Our armies will accordingly advance into Pasala at noon.

While they waited for zero, Kelly completed the task of breaking camp, strapping their tent and equipment into a workmanlike bundle. He finished this job just before twelve, and returned to his prostrate position on the ground sheet.

"I wonder what that blayguard Shannet is doin'?" he said. "I only hope he hasn't missed the news by takin' a thrip to the concession. It'd be unlucky for us if he had."

"I think he'll be there," said Sheridan. "He was in Santa Miranda when we left, and he's likely to stay there and supervise the hunt for the Saint."

"He's a good man, that," said Kelly. "It's a pity he's not an Irishman."

Sheridan fanned himself with a handkerchief.

"He's one of the finest men that ever stepped,' he said. "If the Saint said he was going to make war on Hell, I'd pack a fire extinguisher and go with him."

Kelly sucked his pipe and spat thoughtfully at an ant.

"That's not what I call your duty," he remarked. "In fact, I'm not sure that yez should

have been in this at all, with a girl like Lilla watchin' for yez to come back, and worryin' her pretty head. And with a crawlin' sarpint like Shannet about."

"He's tried to bother her once or twice. But if I thought——"

"I've been thinkin' a lot out here," said Kelly. "I'm not sayin' what I've thought. But it means that as soon as we've done what we're here to do we're goin' to hurry back to Santa Miranda as fast as Tin Lizzie'll take us. There's my missus an' Lilla without a man to look afther them; an' the Saint——"

Sheridan suddenly held up a hand for silence. He wrote rapidly on his little pad, and Kelly leaned over to read.

"What's it mean?"

"The war's on!" yelled Kelly ecstatically. "Don Manuel ain't the quitter I thought he was—or maybe he didn't see how he could get out of it. But the war's on! Hooroosh! There's goin' to be fightin'! Archie me bhoy, the war's on!"

He seized Sheridan in a bear hug of an embrace, swung him off the ground, dropped him, and went prancing round the clearing uttering wild Celtic cries. It was some minutes before he could be sobered sufficiently to give a translation of the message.

It was short and to the point:

The armies of Pasala will resist aggression to the death.

Manuel Concepcion de Villega, being a civilian official, had thought this a particularly valiant and noble sentiment. In fact, he was so pleased with it that he used it to conclude his address to the army when, with the President, he reviewed it before it rode out of Santa Miranda to meet the invaders. Of course the speech should have been made by the President, but his excellency had no views on the subject.

At lunchtime the news came through from Esperanza that the enemy were attacking the town.

Although there had been ample warning, few of the inhabitants had left. The bulk of the population preferred to stay, secure in the belief that wars were the exclusive concern of the professional soldiers and had nothing to do with the general public, except for the inconvenience they might cause.

There was a small garrison stationed in the town, and they had barricaded the streets and settled down to

await the attack. It came at abount one o'clock.

The "invading armies" which Kelly had prepared had been designed by Archie Sheridan, who was something of a mechanical genius.

In the woods on the east, three hundred yards from the front line of improvised fortifications, had been established a line of ten braziers of glowing charcoal, about twenty yards apart. Above each brazier was suspended a string of cartridges knotted at intervals of a few inches into a length of cord. The cord passed over the branch of a tree into which nails had been driven as guides. All these cords were gathered together in two batches of five each at a point some distance away, in such a way that one man, using both hands, could slowly lower the strings of cartridges simultaneously into all ten braziers, and so give the impression that there was firing over a front of two hundred yards. If they had had fireworks they could have saved themselves much trouble; but they had no fireworks, and Archie Sheridan was justly proud of his ingenious substitute.

Sheridan worked the "invading armies," while Kelly lay down behind a tree some distance away, sheltered from any stray bullets, and loaded his rifle. To complete the illusion it was necessary that the firing should seem to have some direction.

Sheridan, with a low whistle, signalled that he was ready, and the battle began.

The cartridges, lowered one by one into the braziers and there exploded by the heat, provided a realistic rattle up and down the line; while Kelly, firing and reloading like one possessed, sent bullets smacking into the walls of the houses and kicking up spurts of dust around the barricades. He took care not to aim anywhere where anyone might be hit.

The defense replied vigorously, though no one will ever know what they thought they were shooting at, and there were some spirited exchanges. When another whistle from Sheridan announced that the strings of cartridges were exhausted, Kelly rejoined him, and they crawled down to the road and the waiting Ford, and drove boldly towards the town, Kelly waving a nearly white flag.

The car was stopped, but Kelly was well known.

"They let me through their lines," he explained to the offier of the garrison. "That is why the firing has ceased. I was in Ondia when war was

declared, and I came back at once."

He told them that he was on his way to Santa Miranda.

"Then travel quickly, and urge them to not delay sending help," said the officer, "for it is clear that we are attacked by a tremendous number. I have sent telegrams, but you can do more by telling them what you have seen."

"I will do that," promised Kelly, and they let him drive on.

As soon as the car was clear of the town he stopped and assisted Sheridan to unearth himself from under the pile of luggage; for, being now an outlaw, Sheridan had had to hide when they passed through the town on the journey up, and it was advisable for him to do the same for most of the return.

A little farther down the road they stopped again, and Sheridan climbed a tree and cut the telegraph wires, so that the news of the fizzling out of the attack should not reach Santa Miranda in time for the troops that had been sent out to be recalled. Instead of organizing the "invasion" they might have tapped the wire there and sent on messages from the commander of the garrison describing the progress of the battle, and so saved themselves much l a b o u r and thought; but the short road between Esperanza and Las Flores (the next town) was too well frequented for that to be practicable in broad daylight.

The Minister of the Interior was informed that it was no longer possible to communicate with Esperanza, and he could see only one explanation.

"Esperanza is surrounded," he said. "The garrison is less than a hundred. The town will fall in twenty-four hours, and the advancing armies of Maduro will meet our reinforcements at Las Flores. It will be a miracle if we can hold the invaders from Santa Miranda for five days."

"You should have kept some troops here," said Shannet. "You have sent every soldier in Santa Miranda. Once that army is defeated there will be nothing for the invaders to overcome."

"To-morrow I will recruit the *peones*," said Don Manuel. "There must be conscription. Pasala requires the services of every able-bodied citizen. I will draft a proclamation to-night for the President to sign."

It was then nearly five o'clock, but none of them had had a siesta that afternoon. They were holding another of

many unprofitable conferences in a room in the palace, and it was significant that Shannet's right to be present was undisputed. The President himself was also there, biting his nails and stabbing the carpet nervously with the rowels of his spurs, but the other two took no notice of him. The President and De Villega were both still wearing the magnificent uniforms which they had donned for the review of the troops that morning.

Shannet paced the room, the inevitable limp unlighted cigarette drooping from his loose lower lip. His once-white ducks were as soiled and sloppy as ever. (Since they never became filthy, it is apparent that he must have treated himself to a clean suit occasionally, but nobody was ever allowed to notice this fact.) His unbrushed hair, as always, flopped over his right eye.

Since the day before, Shannet had had much to think about. Campard's amazing cable, attributing the war to a criminal gang, had arrived, and Shannet had replied with the required information. He had passed on the suggestion of his employer to the Minister of the Interior, pointing to the undoubtedly lawless behaviour of Sheridan and the Unknown; but that two common outlaws could organize a war was a theory which De Villega refused to swallow.

"It is absurd," he said. "They are ordinary criminals two men cannot be a gang. In due time they will be caught, the man Sheridan will be imprisoned, and the man Mussolini will be hanged."

Shannet, asked for the name of the man who had assaulted him, had replied indignantly: "He told me his name was Benito Mussolini!" Since then, he had been impelled to make several protests against the conviction of the officials that this statement was to be believed; but the idea had taken too firm a root, and Shannet had to give up the attempt.

But now he had an inspiration.

"There can be no harm in finding-out," he urged. "Send for the *peón* that all the trouble is about, and let us question him."

"I have a better idea than that," exclaimed De Villega, jumping up. "I will send the *peón* to the garrote to-morrow, for an encouragement to the people. They will enjoy the spectacle, and it will make them more ready to accept the proclamation of conscription. I will make a holiday——"

But Shannet's brain had

suddenly taken to itself an amazing brilliance. In a flash it had soared above the crude and elementary idea of sending for the *peón* and forcing him to speak. He had no interest in De Villega's sadistic elaboration of the same idea. He had seen a much better solution than that.

Rapidly Shannet explained his inspiration to the others. It was as simple as all great inspirations.

He was now firmly convinced in his mind that Sheridan and the Unknown were at the bottom of all the trouble, and this belief was strengthened by the fact that no trace of them had been found since their escape, although both police and military had searched for them. Some of the things that the Unknown had said—before and after the interlude in which words were dispensed with—came back to Shannet with a dazzling clarity. It all fitted in.

And ready to his hand lay the key to the trap in which he found himself. He saw that what the Unknown had started the Unknown could stop. It was Campard's own idea, but Shannet was more conveniently placed to apply it than his master had been. Also, he had the necessary lever within a few minutes' reach.

Lilla McAndrew.

She was the master card. Sheridan, he knew, was infatuated. And Sheridan was an important accomplice of the Unknown. With Lilla McAndrew for a hostage Shannet could dictate his own terms.

"I know I have reason!" Shannet said vehemently, while he inwardly cursed the limitations of his Spanish, which prevented him driving his ideas home into the thick skulls of his audience more forcibly. "I know well the Señor Campard, for whom I have worked for years. Perhaps it sounds fantastic to you, but I know that he is not an easy man to frighten. If I had suggested this to him myself, that these two men could have plotted a war, he would have laughed me to scorn. But he had said it of his own accord. Therefore I know that he must have some information."

"I think everyone has gone mad," said De Villega helplessly. "But you may proceed with your plan. At least it can do no harm. But I warn you that it is on your own responsibility. The Señorita McAndrew is a British subject, and questions may be asked. Then I shall say that I

know nothing of it; and, if the authorities demand it, you will have to be handed over to them."

It was significant of the way in which Shannet's prestige had declined since the commencement of the war, for which De Villega was inclined to blame him; but Shannet did not care.

"I will take the risk," he said, and was gone.

In the palace courtyard his horse was still being held by a patient soldier—one of the half-dozen left behind to guard the palace. Shannet clambered into the saddle and galloped out as the gates were opened for him by a sentry.

His first course took him to an unsavoury café at the end of the town, where he knew he would find the men he needed. He enrolled two. They were pleased to call themselves "guides," but actually they were half-caste cutthroats available for anything from murder upwards. Shannet knew them, for he had used their services before.

He explained what he wanted and produced money. There was no haggling. In ten minutes the three were riding out of the town.

Kelly, too late, had thought of that very possibility, as he had hinted to Sheridan in the jungle clearing that morning. But Kelly and Sheridan were still twenty miles away.

And the Saint, in the President's palatial bathroom, was leisurely completing the process of dressing himself in the clean clothes which he had found. They fitted him excellently.

Meanwhile, the men whom Shannet had left in conference were receiving an unpleasant surprise.

"God!" thundered De Villega. "How did this *peón* escape?"

"Excellency," said the abashed governor of the prison, "it was during the siesta. The man fell down moaning and writhing as if he would die. The warden went to attend him, and the man grasped him by the throat so that he could not cry out, throttled him into unconsciousness, and bound and gagged him. He also surprised the gatekeeper, and hit him in the English fashion——"

De Villega let out an exclamation.

"What meanest thou, pig—'in the English fashion'!"

The governor demonstrated the blow which the gatekeeper had described. It was, in fact, the simple left uppercut of the boxer, and no Latin American who has not been infected with our meth-

ods ever hits naturally like that.

"What manner of man was this *peón?*" demanded Don Manuel, with understanding dawning sickeningly into his brain.

"Excellency, he was tall for a *peón,* and a man of the strength of a lion. If he had washed he would have been handsome, with an aristocratic nose that such a man could hardly have come by legitimately. And he had very white teeth and blue eyes——"

"Bue eyes!" muttered De Villega dazedly, for, of course, to the Latin, all Englishmen have blue eyes.

He turned to the governor with sudden ferocity.

"*Tonto de capirote!*" he screamed. "Imbecile, dost thou not know whom thou hast let slip through thy beastly fingers? Dost thou not even know whom thou hast had in thy charge these three days?"

He thumped upon the table with his fist, and the governor trembled.

"Couldst thou not recognize him, cross-eyed carrion?" he screeched. "Couldst thou not see that he was no true *peón?* Maggot, hast thou not heard of the outlaw Benito Mussolini, for whom the *rurales* have searched in vain while he sheltered safely in the prison under thy gangrenous eyes?"

"I am a worm, and blind, excellency," said the cringing man tactfully, for he knew that any excuse he attempted to make would only infuriate the minister further.

De Villega strode raging up and down the room. Now he believed Shannet, wild and far-fetched as the latter's theory had seemed when he had first heard it propounded. The news of the prisoner's escape, and the—to Don Manuel—sufficient revelation of his real identity, provided incontrovertible proof that the fantastic thing was true.

"He must be recaptured at once!!" snapped De Villega. "Every *guardia* in Santa Miranda must seek him without rest day or night. The *peónes* must be pressed into into the hunt. The state will pay a reward of five thousand *pesos* to the man who brings him to me, alive or dead. As for thee, offal," he added, turning with renewed malevolence upon the prison governor, "if Sancho Quijote, or Benito Mussolini — whatever he calls himself—is not delivered to me in twelve hours I will cast thee into thine own prison to rot there until he is found."

"I will give the orders myself, excellency," said the governor, glad for an excuse to

make his escape, and bowed his way to the door.

He went out backwards, and, as he closed the door, the Saint pinioned his arms from behind, and allowed the point of his little knife to prick his throat.

"Make no sound," said the Saint, and lifted the man bodily off his feet.

He carried the governor down the passage, the knife still at his throat, and took him into a room that he had already marked down in his explorations. It was a bedroom. The Saint deposited the man on the floor, sat on his head, and tore a sheet into strips, with which he bound and gagged him securely.

"I will release you as soon as the revolution is over," the Saint promised, with a mocking bow.

Then he walked back to the other room and entered softly, closing the door behind him. De Villega was penning the announcement of the reward, and it was the President who first noticed the intruder and uttered a strangled yap of startlement.

Don Manuel looked up, and loosed an oath. He sprang to his feet, upsetting the ink pot and his chair, as if an electric current had suddenly been applied to him.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a cracked voice, though he had guessed the answer.

"You know me best as Benito Mussolini, or Sancho Quijote," said the Saint. "My friends—and enemies—sometimes call me *El Santo*. And I am the father of the revolution."

He lounged lazily against the door, head back, hands rested carelessly on his hips. The Saint was himself again, clean and fresh from razor and bath, his hair combed smoothly back. The clothes he had appropriated suited him to perfection. The Saint had the priceless gift of being able to throw on any old thing and look well in it, but few things could have matched his mood and personality better than the buccaneering touch there was about the attire that had been more or less thrust upon him.

The loose, full-sleeved shirt, the flaring trousers, the scarlet sash—the Saint wore these romantic trappings with a marvellous swashbuckling air, lounging there with a reckless and piratical elegance, a smile on his lips. . . .

Seconds passed before the minister came out of his trance.

"Revolution?"

De Villega echoed the word involuntarily, and the Saint

bowed.

"I am the revolution," he said, "and I have just started. For my purpose I arranged that the army should leave Santa Miranda, so that I should have nothing to deal with but a few officials, yourselves, and a handful of *guardias*. Wonderful as I am. I could not fight an army."

"Fool!" croaked Don Manuel, in a voice that he hardly knew as his own. "The army will return, and then you will be shot."

"Permit me to disagree," said the Saint. "The army will return, certainly. It will be to find a new government in power. The army is the servant of the state, not of one man, nor even of one government. Of course, on their return, the soldiers would be free to begin a second revolution to overthrow the new government if they disliked it. But I do not think they will do that, particularly as the new government is going to increase their pay. Observe the subtle difference. To have attempted to bribe the army to support a revolution would have been treason, and rightly resented by all patriotic citizens; but to signalize the advent of the new constitution by a bonus in cash to the army is an act of grace and generosity, and will be rightly appreciated."

"And the people?" said Don Manuel, as in a dream.

"Will they weep to see you go? I think not. You have crushed them with taxes—we shall liberate them. They could have liberated themselves, but they had not the initiative to begin. Now I give them a lead, and they will follow."

The Saint straightened up off the door. His blue eyes, with a sparkle of mischief in them, glanced from the Minister of the Interior to the President, and back to the Minister of the Interior again. His right hand came off his hip in a commanding gesture.

"*Señores,*" he said, "I come for your resignations."

The President came to his feet, bowed, and stood to attention.

"I will write mine at once, *señor,*" he said hurriedly. "It is plain that Pasala no longer needs me."

It was the speech of his life, and the Saint swept him a low bow of approval.

"I thank your excellency!" he said mockingly.

"Half-wit!" snarled De Villega over his shoulder. "Let me handle this!"

He thrust the President back and came around the table.

A sword hung at his side, and on the belt of his cere-

monial uniform was a revolver holster. He stood before the Saint, one hand on the pommel of his sword, the other fiddling with the little strap which secured the flap of the holster. His dark eyes met Simon Templar's bantering gaze.

"Already the revolution is accomplished?" he asked.

"I have accomplished it," said Templar.

De Villega raised his left hand to stroke his moustache.

"*Señor,*" he said, "all this room, which overlooks the front courtyard of the palace. Beyond, as you know, is the Calle del Palacio. Yet we have heard no commotion. Is a people that has been newly liberated too full of joy to speak?"

"When the people hear of their liberation," said the Saint, "you will hear their rejoicing."

De Villega's eye glittered under his black brows.

"And your friends, *señor?*" he pursued. "The other liberators? They have, perhaps, surrounded the palace and overcome the guards without an alarm being raised or a shot fired?"

The Saint laughed.

"Don Manuel," he said, "you do me an injustice. I said I was the father of the revolution. Can a child have two fathers? Alone, Manuel, I accomplished it—yet you persist in speaking of my private enterprise as if it were the work of a hundred. Will you not give me the full credit for what I have done?"

De Villega stepped back a pace.

"So," he challenged, "the people does not know. The palace guards do not know. The army does not know. Will you tell me who *does* know?"

"Our three selves," said the Saint blandly. "Also two friends of mine who organized the war for me. And the governor of the prison, whom I captured on his way to mobilize the *guardias* against me. It is very simple. I intend this to be a bloodless revolution, for I am against unnecessary killing. You will merely resign, appointing a new government in your places, and leave Pasala at once, never to return again on pain of death."

The holster was now undone, and De Villega's fingers were sliding under the flap.

"And you—alone—demand that?"

"I do," said the Saint, and leaped at De Villega as the revolver flashed from its place.

With one arm he grasped Don Manuel around the waist, pinning his left arm to his side; with his left hand he

gripped Don Manuel's right wrist, forcing it back, and twisting.

The President sprang forward, but it was all over in a couple of seconds. The revolver exploded twice, harmlessly, into the floor, and then fell with a clatter as the Saint's grip became too agonizing to be borne.

The Saint hurled De Villega from him, into the President's very arms, and as De Villega staggered back his sword grated out of its sheath and remained in the Saint's right hand. The President's revolver was halfway out of its holster when the Saint let him feel the sword at his breast.

"Drop it!" ordered Simon.

The President obeyed.

Templar forced the two men back to the wall at the sword's point. Then he turned quickly, using the sword to fish up the two revolvers from the floor by their trigger guards, and turned again to halt their immediate rally with the guns impaled on his blade.

From below, through the open windows, came the shouting of the sentries, and the sound of running feet thundered in the passage outside the room.

Like lightning the Saint detached the revolvers from his sword, and held them one in each hand. They covered their owners with an equal steadiness of aim.

The two shots that De Villega had fired, though they had hit no one, had done damage enough. They hadn't entered into the Saint's plan of campaign. He had betted on being quick enough to catch De Villega before he could get his hand to his gun in its cumbersome holster—and the Saint, for once, had been a fraction of a second slow on his timing. But the error might yet be repaired.

"You excellency, to the windows!" rapped the Saint in a low voice. "You, De Villega, to the door! Reassure the guards. Tell them that the President was unloading his revolver when it accidentally exploded. The President will repeat the same thing from the window to the sentries below."

He dodged out of sight behind the door as it burst open, but there was no mistaking the menace of the revolvers which he still focussed on the two men.

The President was already addressing the sentries below. De Villega, with one savagely impotent glance at the unfriendly muzzle that was trained upon him, followed suit, giving the Saint's sug-

gested explanation to the guards who crowded into the doorway.

"You may go," he concluded. "No harm has been done. But remain within call —I may need you shortly."

It required some nerve to add that last remark, in the circumstances, but De Villega thought that the Saint would not betray his presence with a shot if he could possibly help it. He was right. The President came back from the window. The guards withdrew, with apologies for their excited irruption, and the door closed. The Saint slid the bolt into its socket.

"A wise precaution, Don Manuel, to warn the guards that you might need them," he said. "But I do not think it will help you."

He stuck the revolvers into his sash and picked up the sword again. It was a better weapon for controlling two men than his little knife, and much quieter than the revolvers.

"Your resignations or your lives, *señores?*" said the Saint briskly. "I will take whichever you prefer to give, but I must have one or the other at once."

De Villegas sat down at the table but did not write. He unbuttoned his coat, fished out a packet of cigarettes, and lighted one, blowing out a great cloud of smoke. Through it he looked at the Saint, and his lips had twisted into a sneering grin.

"I have another thing to offer, *señor,*" he remarked viciously, "which you might prefer to either of the things you have mentioned."

"Es decir?" prompted Simon, with a frowning lift of his eyebrows.

De Villega inhaled again with relish, and let the smoke trickle down from his nostrils in two long feathers. There was a glow of taunting triumph in his malignant stare.

"There is the Señorita McAndrew," he said, and the Saint's face suddenly went very meek. "What of her?"

"It was the Señor Shannet," said De Villega, enjoying his moment, "who first suggested that you were the man behind the war. We did not believe him, but now I see that he is a wise man. He left us over half an hour ago to take her as hostage. You gave me no chance to explain that when the guards entered the room just now, But I told them to remain within call for that reason—so that I could summon them as soon as you surrendered. Now it is my turn to make an offer. Stop this war, and deliver yourself and

your accomplices to justice, and I will save the Señorita McAndrew. Otherwise——" Don Manuel shrugged. "Am I answerable for the affections of the Señor Shannet?"

A throaty chuckle of devilish merriment shook him, and he bowed to the motionless Saint with a leering mock humility.

"I, in my turn, await your decision, *señor*," he said.

The Saint leaned on his sword.

He was cursing himself for the fool he was. Never before in his career had he been guilty of such an appalling lapse. Never would he have believed that he could be capable of overlooking the probability of such an obvious counter-attack. Now his brain was whirling like the flywheel of a great dynamo, and he was considering, calculating, readjusting, summarizing everything in the light of this new twist that De Villega had given to the affair. Yet his face showed nothing of the storm behind it.

"And how do I know that you will keep your bargain?" he asked.

"You do not know," replied De Villega brazenly. "You only know that, if you do not agree to my terms, the Señor Shannet will certainly take reprisals. I offer you a hope."

So that was the strength of it. And, taken by and large, it didn't strike the Saint as a proposition to jump at. It offered him exactly nothing—except the opportunity to go nap on Don Manuel's honour and Shannet's generosity, two bets which no one could have called irresistibly attractive. Also, it involved Kelly and Sheridan, who hadn't been consulted. And it meant, in the end, that all three of them would most certainly be executed, whatever De Villega decided to do about Lilla McAndrew, whom Shannet would probably claim, and he allowed, as a reward for his share in suppressing the revolution. No. . . .

Where were Kelly and Sheridan? The Saint was reckoning it out rapidly, taking into consideration the age of Kelly's Ford and the reported abominable state of the roads between Esperanza and Santa Miranda. And, checking his calculation over, the Saint could only get one answer, which was that Kelly and Sheridan were due to arrive at any minute. They would learn of the abduction. . . .

"The Señora Kelly?" asked the Saint. "What of her?"

De Villega shrugged.

"She is of no importance."

Yes, Mrs. Kelly would be left behind—if she had not been shot. She was middle-aged and stout and past her attractiveness, and no one would have any interest in abducting her. So that Kelly and Sheridan, arriving at the gungalow, would hear the tale from her.

And then—there was no doubt about it—they would come storming down to the palace, *guardias* and sentries notwithstanding, with cold murder in their hearts.

The Saint came erect, and De Villega looked up expectantly. But there was no sign of surrender in the Saint's poise, and nothing relenting about the way in which he stepped up to the minister and set the point of his sword at his breast.

"I said I came for your resignations," remarked the Saint with a deadly quietness. "That was no idle talk. Write now, De Villega, or, by the vixen that bore thee, thou diest!"

"Fool! Fool!" Don Manuel raved. "It cannot help you!"

"I take the risk," said the Saint icily. "And do not speak so loud—I might think you were trying to attract the attention of the guards. Write!"

He thrust the sword forward the half of an inch, and De Villega started back with a cry.

"You would murder me?"

"With pleasure," said the Saint. "Write!"

Then there was sudden silence, and everyone was quite still, listening. For from the courtyard below the windows came the rattle of urgent hoofs.

The Saint leaped to the windows. There were three horses held by the sentries. He saw Shannet and two other men dismounting—and saw, being lifted down from Shannet's saddlebow, Lilla McAndrew with her hands tied.

He could have shouted for joy at the justification of his bold defiance. And yet, if he had thought a little longer, he might have foreseen that the girl would be brought to the palace. She was not the victim of Shannet's privateering, but an official hostage. But even if the Saint hadn't forseen it, there it was, and he could have prayed for nothing better. He saw all the trump cards coming into his hands. . . .

Then he whipped round, in time to frustrate De Villega's stealthy attack, and the minister's raised arm dropped to his side.

The Saint speared the sword into the floor and slipped the revolvers out of

his sash. For the second time he dodged behind the opening door. He saw the girl thrust roughly into the room, and Shannet followed, closing the door again behind him.

"Fancy meeting you again, honeybunch!" drawled the Saint, and Shannet spun round with an oath.

The Saint leaned against the wall, the presidential and ministerial revolvers in his hands. On his lips was a smile so broad as to be almost a laugh, and there was a laugh in his voice.

"Take that hand away from your hip, Shannet, my pet!" went on the Saint, in that laughing voice of sheer delight. "I've got you covered—and even if I'm not very used to these toys, I could hardly miss you at this range. . . . That's better. . . . Oh, Shannet, my sweet and beautiful gargoyle, you're a bad boy, frightening that child. Take the cords off her wrists, my angel. . . . No, Señor de Villega, you needn't edge towards that sword. I may want it again myself in a minute. *Gracias!* . . . Is that more comfortable, Lilla, old dear?"

"Oh," cried the girl, "thank God you're here! Where's Archie?"

"On his way, old darling, on his way, as the actress said of the bishop," answered the Saint. "Are you all right?"

She shuddered a little.

"Yes, I'm all right," she said. "Except for the touch of his filthy hands. But I was very frightened. . . ."

"Archie will deal with that when he arrives," said the Saint. "It's his business—he'd never forgive me if I interfered. Come here, my dear, keeping well out of the line of fire, while I deal with the specimens. I'm not the greatest revolver shot in the world, and I want to be sure that it won't matter who I hit."

He steered her to safety in a corner, and turned to Don Manuel.

"When we were interrupted," said the Saint persuasively, "you were writing. The interruption has now been disposed of. Proceed, *señor!*"

De Villega lurched back to the table, the fight gone out of him. He could never have envisaged such an accumulation and culmination of misfortunes. It was starting to seem to him altogether like a dream, a nightmare rather—but there was nothing ethereal about the revolver that was levelled so steadily at him. The only fantastic part of the whole catastrophe was the man who had engineered it—the Saint himself, in his extraordinary borrowed clothes,

and the hell-for-leather light of laughing recklessness in his blue eyes. That was the last bitter pill which De Villega had to swallow. He might perhaps have endured defeat by a man whom he could understand—a cloaked and sinister conspirator with a personality of impressive grimness. But this lunatic who *laughed. . . . Que diablos!* It was impossible. . . .

And then, from outside, drifted a grinding, screaming, metallic rattle that could only be made by one instrument in the world.

"Quick!" said the Saint. "Slither round behind Master Shannet, Lilla, darling, and slip the gat out of his hip pocket. . . . That's right. . . . Now d'you mind sticking up the gang for a sec. while I hail the troops? Blaze away if anybody gets funny."

The girl handled Shannet's automatic as if she'd been born with her finger crooked round a trigger, and the Saint, with a nod of approval, crossed over to the window.

Kelly's Ford was drawn up in the courtyard, and both Kelly and Sheridan were there. Kelly was just disposing of a sentry who had ventured to question his right of way.

"Walk right in, soul!" the Saint hailed them cheerily. "You're in time to witness the abdication of the government."

"Have you seen Lilla?" shouted a frantic Sheridan.

The Saint grinned.

"She's safe here, son."

The report of an automatic brought him round with a jerk.

With the Saint's back turned, and the Saint's victory now an accomplished fact, Shannet had chanced everything on one mad gamble against the steadiness of nerve and aim of the girl who for a moment held the situation in her small hands. While Lilla McAndrew's attention was distracted by the irresistible impulse to try to hear what Archie Sheridan was saying he had sidled closer . . . made one wild leaping grab . . . missed. . . .

The Saint stooped over the still figure and made a swift examination. He straightened up with a shrug, picking up his revolvers again as the first of the guards burst into the room.

"Quietly, *amigos*," he urged; and they saw sudden death in each of his hands, and checked.

The next instant the crowd stirred again before the berserk rush of Archie Sheridan, who had heard the shot as he raced up the palace steps. A

yard behind him followed Kelly, breaking through like a bull, his red head flaming above the heads of the guards.

"All clear, Archie!" called the Saint. "It was Shannet who got it."

But Lilla McAndrew was already in Archie Sheridan's arms.

"Here, Kelly," rapped the Saint. "Let's get this over. Take these guns and keep the guards in order while I dispose of the government."

Kelly took over the weapons, and the Saint stepped back and wrenched the sword out of the floor. He advanced towards the President and De Villega, who stood paralyzed by the table.

"You have written?" he asked pleasantly.

De Villega passed over a piece of paper, and the Saint read it and handed it back.

"You have omitted to nominate your successors," he said. "That will be the Señor Kelly and those whom he appoints to help him. Write again."

"Half a minute," Kelly threw back over his shoulder, with his eyes on the shuffling guards. "I don't fancy being President myself—it's too risky. I'll be Minister of the Interior, and the President can stay on, if he behaves himself."

The President bowed.

"I am honoured, señor," he assented with alacrity.

"Write accordingly," ordered the Saint, and it was done.

The Saint took the document and addressed the guards.

"By this," he said, "you know that the President dismisses Señor Manuel Concepcion de Villega, the Minister of the Interior, and his government, and appoints the Señor Kelly in his place. To celebrate his appointment, the Señor Kelly will in a few days announce the removal of a number of taxes which have hitherto oppressed you. Now take this paper and cause it to be embodied in a proclamation to the free people of Pasala. Let to-morrow be a public holiday and a day of rejoicing for this reason, and also because it is now proved that there is no war with Maduro. That was rumour spread by certain malicious persons for their own ends. See that a *radiógrafo* is sent to *Estados Unidos*, explaining that, and saying that they may recall the warship they were sending. You may go, *amigos*."

There was a silence of a few seconds; and then, as the full meaning of the Saint's speech was grasped, the room rang and echoed again to a

great crash of *Vivas!*

When Kelly had driven the cheering guards out into the passage and closed the door in their faces, Simon Templar thought of something and had the door opened again to send for the governor of the prison. The man was brought quickly.

"*Señor,*" said the Saint, "I apologize for the way I treated you just now. It happened to be necessary. But the revolution is now completed, and you are a free man. I bear you no malice—although I am going to insist that you disinfect your prison."

He explained the circumstances, and the prison governor bowed almost to the floor.

"It is nothing, *ilustrisimo señor,*" he said. "But if I had known I would have seen to it that your honour was given better accommodation. Another time, perhaps. . . ."

"God forbid," said the Saint piously.

Then he turned and pointed to the now terrified De Vilega.

"Take this man with you," he directed. "He is to leave Pasala by the next boat, and meantime he is to be closely guarded. He will probably attempt either to fight or to bribe his escape. My answer to that is that if he is not delivered to me when I send for him, your life and the lives of all your warders wil answer for it."

"It is understood, *señor.*"

Kelly watched the departure of the governor and his prisoner open-mouthed; and when they were gone he turned to the Saint with a blank expression.

"Look here," he said, as if the thought had just struck him—"where's all this fightin' I've been told so much about?"

The Saint smiled.

"There is no fighting," he said. "This has been what I hoped it would be—a bloodless revolution. It was undertaken in the name of a justice which the law could not administer, to ruin a man more than six thousand miles away, back in London, England. He had ruined thousands, but the law could not touch him. This was my method. Your first duty as Minister of the Interior will be to revoke the original oil concession and to make out a fresh one, assigning the rights, in perpetuity, to Miss McAndrew and her heirs." He laid a hand on Kelly's shoulder. "I'm sorry to give you such a disappointment, son; and if you must have a fight, I'll have a round or two with you myself before dinner. But I had to do it this way. Any other kind of revolution would have meant the sacrifice of many lives,

and I didn't really want that."

For a moment Kelly was silent and perplexed before the Saint's sudden seriousness; then he shrugged, and laughed, and took Simon Templar's hand in a huge grip.

"I don't confess to know what yez are talkin' about," he said. "And I don't care. I suppose it's been worth it—if only to see the look on De Villega's ugly face whin yez sent him to prison. And, anyway, a laughin' devil who can run a show like yez have run this one deserves to be allowed to work things his own way."

"Good scout!" smiled the Saint. "Was Mrs. Kelly all right?"

"A bit scared, but no harm done. It was Lilla she was afraid for. They just tied the missus up in a chair and left her. An' that reminds me—there was a cable waitin' for me up at the bungalow, and I can't make head or tale of it. Maybe it's something to do with you."

Kelly fumbled in his pocket and produced the form. The Saint took it over, and one glance told him that it was meant for him.

"It's from an agent of mine in London," he explained. "He wouldn't have addressed it to Archie or me in case anything had gone wrong and it was intercepted."

He knew the code almost perfectly, and he was able to write the translation in between the lines at once.

Pops down trumped twelve thousand . . .

The Saint wrote:

P. O. P.'s fell heavily. Cleared twelve thousand pounds. Campard committed suicide this morning.

It was signed with the name of Roger Conway.

"Archie!" called the Saint, thoughtfully; and again: "Archie!"

"They sneaked out minutes ago," said Kelly. "She's a sweet girl, that Lilla McAndrew."

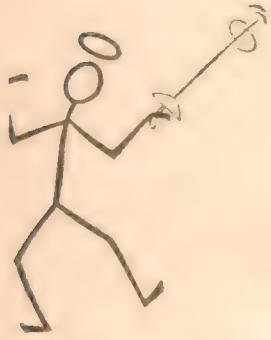
And it was so, until evening.

And at even the Saint went forth and made a tour of a number of disreputable cafés, in each of which he bought much liquor for the clientele. They did not recogniże him until he started to sing—a strange and barbarous song that no one could understand. But they recognized it, having heard it sung before, with many others like it, by a certain *peón:*

"The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-al-ing,
For you but not for me;
For me the angels sing-a-ling-a-ling,
They've got the goods for me,
O death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling,
Where, grave, thy victory . . ."

To this day you will hear that song sung by the peasants of Santa Miranda. And if you should ask one of them why he sings it, he will answer, with courteous surprise at your ignorance: "That, *señor*, is one of the songs of freedom. . . ."

GLUE SNIFFING



New Jersey police, faced with the problem that it is actually not illegal for anyone in the state to sniff glue (we'll explain in a moment what this means), have gotten around the issue by booking minors caught sniffing glue on juvenile delinquency charges on the grounds that doing this is detrimental to health.

This is perhaps the legal understatement of the year. The effects of sniffing glue are similar to those of heavy drinking. There is a false sensation of well-being, a completely uninhibited state during which the youngster can get into serious trouble. Five boys, aged nine to fourteen, sniffed glue one night, for instance, and then went out and wrecked a railroad signal device. A sixteen year old boy stole a motorcycle. He explained that he liked to ride motorcycles.

Apart from the reality that continued addiction can result, among other things, in blindness or even in death, the biggest danger is, in the considered opinion of police authorities, that glue-sniffers may try other and even more dangerous ways of getting 'high'. "Every glue-sniffer is a potential dope addict", to quote Lt. William Kraus, head of the Detective Bureau, Rutherford, New Jersey. This is one reason why storekeepers in that town were asked by Police Chief Edwin Bigelman, the past fall, to supply the names, addresses and telephone numbers of minors who bought airplane glue.

errand boy

by Richard Deming

"Do you have to go out again tonight?" Phyllis Stroud asked petulantly.

Barney Stroud tilted up her chin to give her an apologetic kiss on the nose. "Do you think I like leaving you alone, baby? You know I'm nuts about you."

This wasn't just husbandly flattery. Even after two years of marriage Barney was still astonished at having managed to snare a wife such as Phyllis. She was not only the most beautiful woman he had ever known, with a lovely, sensitive face surrounded by a halo of honey blonde hair, and possessing a figure which popped men's eyes, but she had class. Though her parents were now broke because of some unwise investments by her father, Phyllis was a Caldwell, and in St. Vincent the name Caldwell was equivalent to Cabot or Lodge in Boston.

Phyllis was a Vassar graduate. Barney had grown up in the slums of St. Vincent and had quit school at sixteen. He not only loved his wife, he was deeply awed by her background.

A lot of people were. If they

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hadn't been, Phyllis could hardly have lifted her racketeer husband into her own elite social set, but instead would have been summarily dropped from the social register for marrying so far beneath her. But in St. Vincent a Caldwell could do no wrong. Barney was quite aware that he was tolerated by St. Vincent high society solely because he was Phyllis's husband.

The only thorn in his Garden of Eden was that he didn't know how to handle his wife when she became condescending. Before he met and married Phyllis, Barney had always practiced the role of the dominant male. If one of his old flames from the south side had ever spoken to him half as belittlingly as Phyllis often did, he would have slapped her silly. But you can't treat a goddess the same way you treat a tramp. Even when his wife sometimes informed him that the only reason she had married an unschooled racketeer was because he had money, it only made him miserable instead of angry. He wasn't about to do anything which might cause Phyllis to walk out on him.

"What is it tonight?" she asked with a touch of ice. "More errand running for Johnny Nash?"

Barney had given up trying to explain to Phyllis that as third man from top in the Drennan-Nash combine he was considerably more than an errand boy. Because she disliked Johnny Nash, she seemed to have the peculiarly fixed idea that the man deliberately cut in on Barney's evenings by dreaming up unnecessary chores for him to perform.

Oddly, she never made similar objections when he was called out at night by Nash's partner, Mark Drennan. She seemed to like Drennan, or at least to accept him socially.

Of course Drennan had a veneer of breeding which put him at ease in Phyllis' social set, while Johnny Nash looked and talked like what he was: a successful gangster. Furthermore Mark Drennan, who was a bachelor, never showed up at Phyllis' social affairs with a feminine partner who didn't fit in, whereas Johnny Nash always did on the rare occasions he was invited. He couldn't avoid it, because his feminine partner was always his wife, a beautiful but ungrammatical woman who gave away her ex-stripper background every time she opened her mouth.

As one of her husband's bosses, Johnny Nash and his

wife had to be invited to at least some of Phyllis's parties, but she hated to have either one in the house.

Barney said pacifically, "Johnny's not even in town. I have to drop some tally sheets by Mark's place."

"Oh," she said, mollified. "Will you be long?"

"Not more than an hour," he assured her.

As he drove away from the house, Barney thought aggrievedly that he wasn't as bad a catch as Phyllis liked to make out. Maybe he didn't have the education and social grace of her friends, but he was more of a bargain physically than any of them. He stood six feet two, without an ounce of fat on him, and the girls on the south side had considered him about the handsomest guy around. Anyway, under Phyllis' tutelage, he had managed to develop enough surface polish and to straighten out his grammar enough so that her friends seldom, any more, looked down their noses at him.

And he certainly had more money than most of her friends. Phyllis had a hundred-thousand-dollar home in which to entertain, she drove her own Lincoln convertible, wore Paris fashioned clothes, owned a couple of minks and nearly as much jewelry as Tiffany's. Which wasn't bad progress for a young man of twenty-six who had owned only one pair of pants ten years before.

Of course, as Phyllis liked to point out, he had come to a dead end. The only move upward left to make would be to take over top spot from the Drennan - Nash partnership, and neither partner was likely to retire voluntarily for at least another twenty-five years.

At sixteen Barney Stroud had started running numbers for the Drennan-Nash combine, which at that time was just beginning to organize the city's divergent rackets into a single centrally-controlled organization. Mark Drennan and Johnny Nash, respectively only twenty-four and twenty-five themselves, had moved in on existing rackets with a combination of brashness, muscle and organizing know-how which left the combine in undisputed control of local rackets by the time Barney could vote.

He had moved right along with it, rising from runner to muscle man, then to district manager and, finally, to "thumb man" in charge of all collections and payoffs.

Barney was already third man from top when he met and married Phyllis. He had

been pretty proud of that position until she began belittling him as an "errand boy." But now he did considerable d r e a m i n g about eventually moving into top spot. His dreams weren't inspired by ruthless ambition, for actually he was quite content with his lot. It was just that he envisioned commanding his wife's respect if he was in a position to give orders instead of taking them.

It was only idle dreaming, though. Mark Drennan was now only thirty-four and Johnny Nash thirty-five. By the time either decided to retire, Barney would be in his mid-fifties himself.

Of course premature retirement could be effected with a gun, but this was impractical.

The dream had become persistent enough to make Barney think of resolving his problem with a gun, but he had discarded the idea almost as soon as he thought of it. This wasn't the roaring twenties, when an ambitious young hood could blast his way to the top. Modern rackets were conducted as businesses, with a minimum of headline-making violence. The general public no longer stoically accepted gang killings, and the politicians, without whose protection rackets couldn't exist, were leery of aroused public opinion. The local officials who accepted the combine's payoff to prevent the police from interfering with its activities would never stand still for anything even remotely resembling old-fashioned gang warfare.

Barney knew that even if he managed to beat the raps legally, he couldn't win by using his gun on Drennan and Nash. The finger would point straight at him, and the local administration wouldn't require legal evidence to dump him. As nobody, regardless of the guns behind him, could take over without political backing, anything as crude as murder would bounce Barney right out of the picture altogether.

So Barney Stroud merely dreamed of how nice it would be to become top dog. He didn't really plan to do anything about it.

It was about nine P.M. Barney parked in front of Mark Drennan's house. Ordinarily he delivered tally sheets to Johnny Nash, as Nash handled the routine business end of the partnership, while the more suave Drennan was the contact man who lined up and paid off the necessary officials. But tonight Johnny Nash was out of town and Barney had instructions to deliver tallies

to Drennan whenever Nash wasn't available.

Although Mark Drennan was a bachelor, he maintained a sevenroom ranch style house on Shannon Drive in one of St. Vincent's most exclusive sections. Barney supposed it was because he liked to entertain, though most of his parties were rumored to consist of only himself and some lone woman. Drennan had the reputation of being something of a Casanova.

The front of the house was dark when Barney came up the front walk, but he noted light streaming through some French doors at the side. As he knew the French doors gave onto a small play room where there was a bar, he guessed that Drennan was there and walked around to the side.

As he approached the French doors, he saw a man and woman standing in front of the bar clasped in each other's arms. The man, tall, lean and darkly handsome, half faced the doors so that Barney could see he was Mark Drennan. As the woman's back was to him, he could see only that she was a slim and shapely brunette.

Barney paused, not wishing to interrupt such an intimate scene. Then the woman disengaged herself from the embrace and picked up one of two drinks setting on the bar. The movement placed her profile to Barney.

With a sense of shock Barney recognized her as Nina Nash.

He stood still, momentarily appalled at Mark Drennan's perfidy. Even though Drennan was a notorious woman chaser, it would never have occurred to Barney that he would poach on the domain of his own partner, who was also supposed to be his best friend.

Quietly he faded back toward the front of the house. After standing indecisively for a few moments, he mounted the porch and rang the front doorbell.

A couple of minutes passed before a light went on in the front room and the door opened. There was a frown on Mark Drennan's handsome face when he peered out, but his expression cleared when he saw who his visitor was.

"Hi, Barney," he said. "What's up?"

Beyond Drennan, Barney could see that the doorway to the playroom had been left open, but the room was now dark. He said, "Just the week's tally sheets. Johnny's out of town, you know." He held out the manila envelope containing the tally sheets.

"Oh, yeah," Drennan said, accepting the envelope. "I'd forgotten that."

Forgotten it, hell, Barney thought. He'd taken full advantage of it.

"Come in for a drink?" Drennan asked without moving aside. His tone was more polite than enthusiastic.

Barney was tempted, just to see what evasive action Nina Nash would take, but he decided against it.

"No thanks," he said. "Phyllis is waiting for me at home."

During the drive back home Barney brooded over what he had seen. And as the shock abated, it gradually dawned on him that he had stumbled onto something which might move him right into the top slot.

No one would suspect Barney if one of the partners was gunned and the other was convicted of the crime. The idea had tentatively occurred to him once before, but he had rejected it because he couldn't think of any motive the police would swallow. The partners got along too amicably for the police to accept that either would gun the other merely to take over control of the combine alone.

But a love triangle offered a perfect motive for murder.

When he entered the house, Phyllis was in the bar off the front room working on the invitation list for her next party. Offering a cool cheek for his kiss of hello, she asked preoccupiedly, "How's Mark?"

"Fine," he said.

She added a name to the list, then glanced up. "Do you think we can skip Johnny and Nina again this time?"

Walking over behind the bar to mix himself a drink, Barney said, "They're going to start suspecting how you feel about them, hon. And, after all, I have to get along with Johnny."

"Yes, I suppose an errand boy can't afford to offend the boss," she said, making a face. "I wish you didn't have to take orders from that man. I would have more respect for you if you quit the whole setup and went into some honest business."

He poured soda on top of whisky. "You knew what I was when you married me."

"Not exactly, darling. I knew you were some kind of gangster, which held a certain fascination for me, because I'd never known an underworld character before. But I didn't realize you took orders from such a crude boor as Johnny Nash. It's not your profession I object to. It's probably the only one in which you could make enough money

to suit me. It's just your status in the profession that turns my stomach."

Barney stirred his drink and sampled it. Resting his elbows on the bar, he gazed at his wife's profile.

"You wouldn't fuss so much if I was top dog, huh?"

She was busy with her list again. Preoccupiedly she said, "I wouldn't fuss at all."

Barney came to a decision. He was going to take advantage of what he had learned tonight.

He lay awake and thought about it long after Phyllis had gone to sleep. The first step, he decided, was to make sure the motive would come to light immediately after the murder, before the police had time to look in any other direction. And the surest way to accomplish that was to let the affair betwen Mark Drennan and Johnny Nash's wife become known to the police in advance.

He could hardly just inform them. But there was a way to let information seep to the police naturally without leaving any trace of its source. A rumor planted in the underworld grapevine would eventually reach some informer, who in turn would relay it on to the police.

Of course if the rumor also reached either Drennan or Nina Nash, caution might cause them to break off the affair. But he was reasonably certain that none of the principals would hear the gossip, because those talked about are always last to hear.

The next morning Barney entered a pool hall on lower State Street. Singling out a tall, lanky man of about forty who was idly watching a snooker game, Barney called him aside.

"I've got a little private job for you, Bulletin," he said. "Can you keep your mouth shut?"

Bulletin Willie Gloff nodded eagerly. "Sure, Barney. You know me."

Barney did know him, which was the reason he had picked him. Bulletin Willie got his nickname from his chronic eagerness to be the first to pass on gossip. As he worked as a leg man for a half dozen of the combine's bookies, he had daily contacts with a lot of people. No one could spread a rumor faster than Bulletin Willie Gloff.

"This is strictly confidential," Barney said. "I don't want you to mention it to a soul."

Bulletin Willie raised his right hand. "I'm a clam, Barney."

"Okay. This has to do with the good of the organization.

I'm a little worried about Johnny."

"Johnny Nash?"

"Nh-huh. You know how nuts he is about his wife."

"Sure. Something happen to Nina?"

"Not yet. And I want to make sure it doesn't. I got wind that she's doing a little drifting."

The lanky man emitted a soundless whistle. "Johnny'll knock her ears off. Who with?"

"That I didn't hear. I want to make sure the scoop is right before I got off half-cocked by giving her the Dutch uncle bit. Johnny would blow his lid if I stuck my nose in and it turned out there was nothing to it."

Bulletin Willie nodded sagely. "Yeah, I can see how it'd be a kind of delicate spot for you. You'd like to nip it, but you can't just walk up to Nina and start accusing her. If she's innocent, she'd run crying to Johnny and he'd come down on you with both feet."

"You get the picture. I have to know for sure before I make a move. If it's a bum steer, I'll keep my trap shut, but if she is drifting, I want to know it. You follow me?"

"Sure. You want me to do some tailing."

"I want you on her every night. Days don't matter, because she won't be playing footsie while the sun's out, But you have her staked out by dusk every night. I want to know everywhere she goes and everybody she sees."

"You can count on me, Barney. I'll stick to her like a can tied to a cat's tail."

Barney took out his wallet and removed a fifty-dollar bill. "Here's something for your trouble. Do a good job and I'll match it."

That took care of that, he thought as he left the pool hall. Even if the rumor was traced back to its source, which was unlikely, no one could say that Barney Stroud had ever mentioned Mark Drennan and Nina Nash in the same breath. All he had to do now was relax and let nature take its course.

Four nights later, on a Sunday, Bulletin Willie phoned him at home.

"Anybody listening?" he asked.

"Yes," Barney said. Phyllis was seated not ten feet away.

"Then I'll hold it until morning. About nine o'clock at the pool hall?"

"Okay," Barney said, and hung up.

"Who was that?" Phyllis asked.

"Business," he said, which killed her interest.

At nine Monday morning

he found Bulletin Willie waiting for him at the pool hall. The lanky man was so bursting with news, he could hardly contain himself.

"You're not going to believe this," he said. "But it's gospel truth. Saturday she spent the whole blame night at a guy's place."

"What guy?"

Bulletin Willie grinned, drawing it out in order to increase the suspense. "You're never going to believe it."

"Try me," Barney said impatiently.

The lanky man let a pause build before saying with relish, "Mark Drennan."

Barney let his eyes register shock, then narrow. After a moment of silence, he took out his wallet and gave the man another fifty-dollar bill.

Bulletin Willie pocketed the bill. "Johnny will kill him," he commented.

"Not if he never finds out," Barney said. "I'll take it from here. Just keep your mouth shut."

"Sure, Barney. I wouldn't say anything."

Except to your friends, in strict confidence, Barney thought. He gave the gossip three days to spread all over the grapevine.

His estimate was conservative. Within two days he had heard the news from three different sources that Mark Drennan was carrying on an affair with Nina Nash.

The following Saturday was Phyllis' party, and both the Nashes and Mark Drennan were there. In public Nina and Drennan were being very cautious, Barney noted. Except for one duty dance, Drennan didn't go near the woman all evening.

Johnny Nash, big and wide-shouldered and somehow rumpled-looking despite his perfectly pressed two-hundred-dollar suit, as usual spent most of the evening at the bar. About midnight Barney drifted over next to him.

"Having fun?" he asked.

The big man shrugged. "You know me, Barney. These friends of yours ain't exactly in my class. I come because Nina likes to rub shoulders with the aristocracy."

"Oh, they're not so bad when you get to know them," Barney told him. "Buy you a drink?"

"Sure," Nash said, draining his glass and setting it on the bar.

The white-coated bartender Phyllis had hired for the evening was snowed under. Barney walked behind the bar and personally mixed Nash a new drink, using a fresh glass.

As he handed it to Nash, he said, "Nina seems to be

having a good time."

Nash turned to look toward his wife, who was dancing with a portly stockbroker named Myron Wood. With a paper napkin protecting his fingers, Barney quickly lifted the used glass and set it in the waste receptacle beneath the bar. He dropped the napkin over it.

He hadn't definitely devised a murder plan yet, but a glass with Johnny Nash's fingerprints on it might come in handy.

Hours later, after everyone had gone home, he retrieved the glass and hid it behind some bottles in the liquor storage cabinet.

Before he was able to devise a workable plan, Barney had to postpone the whole thing. The syndicate which furnished the combine its turf news and form sheets announced a hike in price. The syndicate was headquartered in Kansas City and the local branch printery claimed it had no control over the decision. Mark Drennan sent Barney to Kansas City to register an objection and try to dicker the price back down. It took him three weeks to work out a compromise deal.

The evening he got back, he found Phyllis all dressed to leave the house.

"Where we going?" he asked. "I planned to spend tonight at home."

"You are, " she told him. "Mother's not feeling well. She asked me to spend the night with her."

Phyllis' father had died about six months before, and her mother wasn't in very good health. With increasing frequency the old lady asked her only daughter to spend nights with her. Barney could hardly object, but he often wished Phyllis would be as conscientious about his welfare as she was about her mother's.

His first night back he had to sleep alone.

The front for the combine's business ventures was the Drennan-Nash Realty Company in downtown St. Vincent. Mark Drennan didn't show up the next morning, and as operation costs was something in Drennan's province instead of Nash's, Barney phoned his home at noon. Drennan sounded as though he had been awakened from a sound sleep.

"I was in an all-night poker game," he informed Barney. "Tell Johnny I won't be in today. Want to drop by here tonight to make your report?"

"All right," Barney said. "See you about nine."

Phyllis didn't make her usual objection to his going

out at night when she learned his business was with Drennan instead of Nash. Barney arrived promptly at nine and found Mark Drennan at home alone.

"Come in," Drennan said cordially, and led Barney back to the play room. "Drink?"

"A little bourbon and soda," Barney said.

Drennan went behind the bar to mix two drinks, then, rested his forearms on the bar.

"Any success?" he inquired.

"Some. They're willing to split the difference. They claim rising printing costs."

Mark Drennan pursed his lips. "Everything's going up," he conceded. "But how do we know they won't hike the price again a month from now?"

"I got a two-year contract."

Drennan's expression cleared. "That's pretty good work, Barney. I guess you were worth developing. I told Johnny when you first came to work for us that you were a sharp kid."

Barney merely smiled modestly.

By the time he had explained the new contract in detail, their glasses were empty and Drennan mixed another drink. "Long as you're here, Barney, want to do me a favor?"

"Sure, Mark. What?"

Coming from behind the bar, Drennan disappeared into the other room. He returned carrying a German Borchardt-Luger. Drawing back the slide to lock it open, he checked to make sure it was empty and handed it to Barney.

"Just picked this up," he said. "Isn't it a beauty?"

After examining it, Barney clicked the slide shut. "Sure is."

"Mind dropping by police headquarters and registering it for me tomorrow?" Drennan asked. "Have my permit switched over from my thirty-eight to this too."

The combine was careful not to lay its members open to possible concealed weapons charges. With its political influence, it didn't have to risk such minor infractions of the law. Every member of the combine who was authorized by Drennan and Nash to carry a gun had it registered and had a gun permit.

"Sure," Barney said, dropping the gun in his pocket.

The phone rang and Drennan went into the front room to aswer it.

At that moment the plan Barney had been seeking for took shape in all its details.

His tentative idea had been to gun Drennan and let Johnny Nash take the blame. But now he realized that the jealousy motive would fit just as well if Drennan was framed for Nash's murder. And he had just been handed the means to frame the kill that way.

In the front room he could hear Drennan talking on the phone. Quickly rounding to behind the bar, he placed a fresh glass on it, took out his handkerchief to avoid leaving fingerprints and poured Drennan's drink from the old glass into the new. Three steps took him to the French doors. Easing one side open, he slipped outside and set the glass containing Drennan's fingerprints on the grass to one side of the doorway.

He was back inside again, leaning against the bar, when Drennan returned.

"Johnny Nash, giving me mild hell for goofing off today," Drennan said with a grin.

When Barney finished his second drink, he said, "I'd better run along, Mark. I've hardly seen Phyllis yet since I got back. Thanks for the drinks."

Outside he slipped around the side of the house, carefully staying close to the building so that he couldn't be seen through the French doors, and retrieved the highball glass, again using his handkerchief.

At home he concealed the glass in the same place as the one containing Nash's fingerprints. He was pleased to note that the glasses were identical in size and shape.

The following morning Barney dropped by police headquarters, handed over the Luger so that the record clerk could copy off the serial number and had the gun registered in Mark Drennan's name. He also had the carrying permit changed to the new gun.

When he left headquarters he drove to a sporting goods store and bought a Borchardt-Luger exactly like the one he had just registered. When he got to the Drennan-Nash Realty Company, he delivered the second Luger to Mark Drennan. The one which was registered was locked in the glove compartment of his car.

He had to wait two more weeks before the precise set of circumstances necessary to carrying out his plan developed. Two factors were necessary: Johnny Nash had to be home alone and Mark Drennan must have no alibi.

Both circumstances developed on a Friday. Johnny Nash announced that his

wife's mother in Chicago had died, and that Nina had flown to Chicago that morning. She planned to be gone a week, Johnny said. Hardly fifteen minutes later Mark Drennan told Barney he intended to spend the weekend at his cabin on Mud Lake.

"Alone?" Barney asked.

"Sure. I always fish alone. Every once in a while I need the solitude. You have the phone number up there in case you have to get in touch with me, haven't you?"

Barney nodded. "Yeah, I have it. When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow morning."

Things worked out even better than Barney could reasonably have expected. Saturday afternoon Phyllis announced that her mother was again ill and that she was spending the night with her. Barney didn't figure he would need an alibi, but it was convenient not to have a witness who could testify that he was away from home at the time of the killing.

He said, "Okay, hon. I'm kind of bushed anyway. I'll hit the sack early and get a decent night's sleep for a change."

The Nashes employed two servants, but neither lived in. To make sure they would be gone for the evening, he waited until ten P.M. before phoning the Nash home. Johnny Nash answered.

"You going to be home for a while?" Barney asked.

"I was planning to go to bed. Why?"

"A little business. I'll stop over in about a half hour."

"Okay," Nash said. "I'll wait up for you."

Barney hung up and dialed station-to-station to Drennan's Mud Lake cabin.

When Drennan's voice said, "Hello," Barney said, "I get you out of bed?"

"Oh, hello, Barney. Yeah, but I wasn't asleep yet."

"Anybody listening?"

"No. I'm all alone."

Barney's sole motive in phoning was to make sure Drennan had no alibi witness, but he had to give some excuse for the call. He said, "Hank Brassard, who runs the book at Fourth and State has been holding out, I just found out. I planned to run over and lean on him a little, but I thought I'd better check first."

"Couldn't you have checked with Johnny?"

"He seems to be out."

"Oh. Well, use your own judgment. You're a big boy. You don't have to check stuff like that with me."

"Okay," Barney said. "Hope you catch a fish."

Carrying a briefcase, he

arrived at the west-side mansion where Johnny Nash lived at ten thirty. Nash, wearing a robe and slippers, admitted him and led him into the huge front room.

"Drink?" he asked.

"No thanks," Barney said. "Anybody here?"

When Nash shook his nead, Barney opened the briefcase and took out the Luger, now equipped with a silencer. Johnny Nash's eyes were just beginning to widen when the bullet crashed into his heart.

Without haste Barney disattached the silencer, replaced it in the briefcase and wiped the gun clean. Dropping it on the floor, he lifted Nash's body to a seated position on the sofa. Positioning a chair on the opposite side of a low cocktail table from the sofa, he wrapped his handkerchief around his hand and removed two highball glases from the briefcase one at a time, setting them side-by-side on the cocktail table.

Going behind the bar, he carried a bottle of whisky and a seltzer siphon over to the cocktail table. After dribbling a little whisky into each glass, he squirted an ounce of seltzer on top of it. He carefully wiped off the bottles before replacing them where he had found them.

The glasses behind the bar were not the same type as the ones he had brought, he noted. It was a good thing he had come equipped with two, as different sized glasses might have struck the police as odd. He felt a touch of uneasiness that no other glasses on the backbar matched the ones on the cocktail table, then decided that probably no one would notice, since the two on the table matched.

He left the front-room lights on and opened the front window drapes before letting himself out. He drove directly home and phoned the police.

"I was just driving by a house when I heard a shot from inside it," he said. "It's at twelve twenty-four Urban Drive in the Chensworth district."

"Who are you?"

"A neighbor from up the street."

The murder occurred too late to make the Sunday morning papers, but it was on the air. The announcer said that as the result of an anonymous phose call reporting gunfire at Nash's home, police had visited the place. When there was no answer to their ring. an officer had peered through a window into the lighted front room, had spotted Nash's body and the police had then broken in.

Beyond these bare details,

the police had as yet issued no statement, but the news commentator surmised that inasmuch as Johnny Nash had been a known racketeer, it had been a gang killing.

At three P.M. Barney got the first of a series of phone calls from combine personnel wondering if he had heard the news. Pretending that he hadn't, he phoned police headquarters for details.

As the combine had pretty good relations with the police, the desk man was cooperative enough, but he didn't have much information to pass out. He told Barney that they had the murder weapon and were running a check on it and that they also had the killer's fingerprints, but a make hadn't as yet come back from the R. and I. bureau. He also informed him that a wire had been sent off to Nash's wife in Chicago.

Phyllis came home at four P.M., completely unaware of what had happened. She exhibited more surprise than shock at the news, and her first reaction was eminently practical.

"How will this effect you?" she asked.

"It won't. Mark will just start running things by himself. He's hardly likely to elevate me to partnership."

"Well, at least the police can't look your way then. My first thought was that maybe you had gotten ambitious."

Barney felt a tingle move along his spine. "What kind of a crack is that?"

"I was just searching for a motive. Somebody obviously had one. But since you don't stand to gain anything, you shouldn't fall under suspicion. Has Nina been informed?"

"The cops sent her a wire," he said shortly.

Monday morning Barney and Phyllis were at breakfast when the district attorney's secretary phoned. She asked Barney to come down to the office and bring his wife with him.

"Why my wife?" he inquired.

"Mr. Eland didn't say, but he wants you both."

When Barney informed Phyllis of the call, she frowned. "I suppose it's about Johnny Nash, but why do they want me?"

"Eland's secretary didn't know, but she was pretty definite about it."

When they arrived at the district attorney's office, they were escorted right into Maurice Eland's private office. Mark Drennan was already there. He smiled at both Barney and Phyllis as though he didn't have a care in the world.

Short, plump District Attorney Maurice Eland was plainly uncomfortable, which didn't surprise Barney. Since the man was on the payroll of the combine, there were two factors in this affair to upset him. He wouldn't like the headlines about Johnny Nash's death being a gang killing, and he wouldn't be enthusiastic about having to prosecute one of the men who lined his pockets. He bustled about nervously placing chairs before his desk for his trio of visitors before seating himself behind the desk.

"We have a pretty embarrassing situation here," he announced. "I'm hoping you can straighten it out, Barney."

Barney hiked his eyebrows, but remained silent.

Mark Drennan said offhandedly, "They're trying to pin Johnny's kill on me, Barney. Seems my gun was found at the scene and checked out as the murder weapon. There was also a highball glass with my fingerprints on it."

Phyllis emitted a little gasp. "Mark! You didn't!"

Drennan gave her a reassuring smile. "Hardly. When I was picked up, I was carrying a gun exactly like the murder weapon, but it seems it wasn't registered to me. Somewhere along the line there was a switch."

Maurice Eland cleared his throat. "If Mark did commit this crime, he seems to have been incredibly sloppy about it. Which inclines me to give credence to his claim that it's a frame. That's why you're here, Barney."

"What do I know about it?"

"Time of death has been pretty definitely established as around ten thirty Saturday night," the D.A. said. "The body was discovered only an hour later, so they were able to cut it pretty close. Mark has advanced an alibi, and if it stands up, he'll be in the clear despite the circumstantial evidence against him. He says you're his alibi, Barney."

Barney put a puzzled expression on his face. "At ten thirty Saturday night I was home in bed."

"Mark claims he got a phone call from you at his Mud Lake cabin at ten Saturday night. If you can verify that, he obviously couldn't have been in St. Vincent a half hour later. It's a good hundred-mile drive."

Barney looked at Drennan, who had a waiting expression on his face. Barney let his own expression become dubious.

"Well?" Drennan asked. "What are you waiting for?"

Barney slowly shook his head. "Sorry, Mark. I'd do a lot for you, but not perjury."

Mark Drennan seemed more regretful than disturbed. He said quietly, "You're denying you phoned me, Barney?"

"I have to, because I didn't."

Drennan shrugged. "Then I guess I'll have to spring my other alibi witness. I was hoping I wouldn't. Tell Mr. Eland, honey."

Barney's gaze swung to his wife. Her sudden flush sent a shock wave through him.

When Phyllis remained silent, her eyes avoiding everyone in the room, Drennan said gently, "You have to talk, honey. Barney set this up, because he was the only one in a position to switch guns on me. The frame will work if you don't talk."

Phyllis's flush deepened. After one quick glance at Barney, her eyes moved straight ahead to the space between Barney and Drennan. In a metallic voice she said, "I was at the cabin when my husband phoned. I had been there about an hour. I was still there until twelve noon on Sunday. Mark wasn't out of my sight the whole time."

Barney gaped back and forth from his wife to Drennan in stunned disbelief. "But —but Nina was the one——" His voice trailed off.

"Not since your trip to Kansas City," Drennan said calmly. "You haven't any kick. All I stole was your wife. You tried to steal my life."

Maurice Eland said with distaste, "It does seem pretty obvious that you tried to frame Mark, Barney. Which makes it equally obvious that you killed Johnny Nash."

Barney pulled himself together enough to throw Phyllis a murderous glance. "Try to prove it," he spat.

"Oh, I doubt that we could. I was just interested in seeing Mark cleared. What happens now is up to him."

Mark Drennan came lazily erect, took Phyllis' hand and drew her to her feet. Ignoring Barney, he said, "Shall we go, baby? I think we're finished here."

The chill didn't begin to hit Barney until the door closed behind them.

Then he said huskily, "What do you mean, what happens now is up to Mark?"

"You ought to know that," Eland said. "Johnny was his best friend."

There were twenty-two members of the combine with gun permits, Barney thought. He was staggering slightly when he rose from his chair and left the office. . . .

the phantom gardener

by Nigel Balchin

I DON'T know when I first saw Joe Lewis. But it will certainly have been in the garden.

He was as much a part of the garden as the shrubbery down at the end and the big beech tree with a seat round it.

At the time when I first remember him I don't think he can possibly have been more than 50. But he seemed old to me, and I remember being told as a child that he had gardened for my grandfather and father for 35 years.

He must have been a handsome man when he was young. By the time I knew him he was already beginning to be bent from much digging and weeding. But he had the typical downsman's eyes—unusually bright, rather cold blue eyes that always seemed to be focused on something a long way away.

At that time Joe's garden—I mean our garden—seemed to be about the size of Hyde Park. In fact it wasn't really very big. But it was a lot for one man to handle, particu-

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larly if it was to be kept as Joe liked to keep it, against the combined destructive efforts of myself, my brother and sister, the dogs, the cats, the jays, invading rabbits and other pests.

In the busy seasons Joe usually worked from about seven o'clock in the morning till it was dark, six days a week. Perhaps it was not surprising that in the years that I knew him I never saw Joe in a really good temper. He just varied between being grumpy and being very grumpy. "Cross-grained" was my father's description of him, and he was one of the proudest and most obstinate human beings I have ever met.

When my father died, and I inherited the place and Joe, I had plans for some small changes in the garden. They were never made.

It was not that Joe refused to make them. It was simply that in some odd way the proper time to begin them never arrived. It was too early in the season, and then suddenly it was too late.

After a few years I gave it up, and for the remainder of the 12 years or so that Joe worked for me everything was done in the proper place and sequence, as it had been done for my grandfather and father. But he was a very good gardener, and I remember that I always thought his spade was made of silver, he kept it so beautifully clean and polished.

It was just after the war that Joe left me, and to this day I have never been quite sure why. He was at least 80 by then, and getting rather deaf, so there was nothing unreasonable about it. But, even so I was startled when he came to me one day and said in his gruff way, "Shan't be coming no more after this week"—and after that, nothing I could say made any difference.

In the course of the next few weeks he told different people at least four stories about why he had left. To me, it was that his wife thought he should give up. After all, there was enough money coming in from the two boys who were still at home, and if he worked there was some complication about his old age pension.

This was probably the real reason. But to somebody else he said that he had left because my dog had dug up a row of seedlings; to another that I had criticised something he had done; and finally, to yet another, that I had not paid his wages. All of these, of course, except the

first, were complete nonsense, and I doubt if he even expected anyone to believe them. It was just that, being Joe, he could not give up his job, even at 80, without having a grouse about something.

Joe's rather sudden departure left me in a difficult position. A decent gardener is a rare bird nowadays in our district. Moreover, I was now living mainly in London, and only coming to the house at week-ends.

For practically a year I suffered from a distressing procession of unsupervised "jobbing gardeners." They stayed on the average two months, and then wandered away to lean on their spades elsewhere.

At length about a year after Joe left, even this sorry supply dried up, and I was left gardenerless.

By this time Joe Lewis's beautifully kept garden was already beginning to get out of hand, and after a couple of months without any attention it was on the way to becoming a wilderness.

One evening when I was looking at it rather dismally, I saw old Joe coming along the lane that passes the top of the garden. He paused and looked over the hedge. I was too far away to see his face, but knowing Joe I could imagine the grim satisfaction it gave him and how he would go home and say, "Rare kind o' mess up there now, since I packed up."

He stood there for a long time looking, and then turned and went off with his queer heavy trudging walk.

And then an odd thing happened. It was in the early spring, and the vital thing was to get the garden dug.

At the week-end I travelled down from London to the house and went out into the garden with a spade. To my surprise, I found that a sizeable plot in the vegetable garden had been dug already—and recently. Somebody had put in at least a couple of days hard work in my absence. I was completely mystified, because even if one of the local men had had time to spare, he would hardly have come and started work without asking me.

But at the next week-end the mystery deepened, and continued to deepen thereafter. For every time I visited the place my phantom gardener had been at work. There was never anything to indicate who had been there, but gradually the place came back into some sort of order. The ground was dug over. Seeds were planted at the normal time. The flowerbeds were

cleaned out and tidied—in fact, everything was done that one might have expected from a good man working a couple of days a week. Moreover, there was something very familiar about the way the work was done.

This had been going on for weeks when I met Joe one day in the village and tackled him about it. I said, "Look here, Joe, somebody's been doing my garden while I'm away. Is it you?" He looked at me with the distant, rather sullen blue eyes and said, "Doin' yer garden?" Why should I? I left, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I thought you mightn't have liked to see it in such a mess, and——"

Joe shook his head and said curtly "I don't have no call to do nobody's garden any more. I've got enough coming in for what I want, and I'm finished with gardening like I told you."

I said, "Well, whoever it is, it's very good of him. But I don't like to have the work done and not pay for it."

"Mebbe he's a millionnaire and don't want yer money," said Joe sarcastically. "Anyways, it was time enough *somebody* did it from what I see the other day. Rare old mess it was."

I hesitated and said "You wouldn't like to come back, would you? It needn't be full time unless you like. You could just put in an hour or two when you felt like it——"

"What—come back after I given in my notice? Not me. Tell you—I'm finished with gardening. Anyways, you don't want me. You got a chap does it for nothing. What you fussing about?" And he turned and trudged away without another word.

After that, it was difficult to see what to do about it. My phantom gardener continued to look after the place all that year. I was glad to see that when the crops came along he helped himself to small quantities of the vegetables he had grown. But if there was any sign of a shortage in any direction, that thing was never touched. It was a poorish year for strawberries, for example. The phantom gardener took none. At length I felt that I could not go on any longer without trying to say "Thank you" in some form, so one week-end I wrote a note, saying how grateful I was and left it, together with five pounds, in the potting shed, merely addressed "To Whom it May Concern." The following week-end both note and money was still there, but somebody had sprayed the tomato plants and trimmed the hedge. For a while I had to

admit defeat.

And then, as the autumn came and the days grew colder, I had an idea. I remembered the legend of Robin Goodfellow—the fairy, Puck, who would do the housewife's work for her at night, so long as she left him a bowl of cream as a reward. Without comment, I placed on the potting shed table a miniature of whisky—one of those little bottles, made for travellers, that hold about two drinks. The following week-end the bottle was empty. I had found the phantom's Achilles heel. When I left for London I filled the little bottle again; and I continued to fill it every week-end for nearly a year.

I never saw my phantom gardener at work. But going as usual to the potting shed one evening, when I arrived from London. I found Joe Lewis lying on some straw in a corner, as I had often seen him 30 years before. I thought he was asleep and said: "Hullo, Joe—caught you at last." But he was not asleep, and I had not caught him. I think the last thing that he had done was to clean his spade. It was lying beside him, very bright and silvery.

NEXT MONTH —

THE GAMBLER HATED RATS
by J. JEFFERSON FARJEON

THE BUTLER DIDN'T DO IT
by TALMAGE POWELL

BED TIME STORY
by ROBERT L. FISH

MIDNIGHT RENDEZVOUS
by MARGARET MANNERS

INSTEAD OF THE SAINT — V
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— and other exciting stories and articles in your THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Forthwith this frame of mine
was wrench'd
With a woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my
tale,
And then it set me free.
Since then, at an uncertain
hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told
This heart within me burns.

—Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.

transformation

by

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

I HAVE heard it said, that, when any strange, supernatural, and necromantic adventure has occurred to a human being, that being, however desirous he may be to conceal the same, f e e l s at certain periods torn up as it were by an intellectual earthquake, and is forced to bare the inner depths of his spirit to another. I am a witness of the truth of this. I have dearly sworn to myself never to reveal to human ears the horrors to which I once, in excess of fiendly pride, delivered myself over. The holy man who heard my confession, and reconciled me to the

The Shelleys and their friends were the rebels of their day. This included Mrs. Shelley, author of FRANKENSTEIN, published in 1818, one of the best known books of our time. For the last eight years of his life, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life was bound up with that of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the brilliant poet and agnostic. Friends of Lord Byron and of Leigh Hunt, the Shelleys were noted for what, even in these days, is termed their "heretical" thinking. *H.S.S.*

From: THE KEEPSAKE for 1831, Edited by Frederic Mansel Reynolds

church, is dead. None knows that once———

Why should it not be thus? Why tell a tale of impious tempting of Providence, and soul-subduing humiliation? Why? answer me, ye who are wise in the secrets of human nature! I only know that so it is; and in spite of strong resolve—of a pride that too much masters me—of shame, and even of fear, so to render myself odious to my species—I must speak.

Genoa! my birth-place—proud city! looking upon the blue waves of the Mediterranean sea—dost thou remember me in my boyhood, when thy cliffs and promontories, thy bright sky and gay vineyards, were my world? Happy time! when to the young heart the narrow-bounded universe, which leaves, by its very limitation, free scope to the imagination, enchains our physical energies, and, sole period in our lives, innocence and enjoyment are united. Yet, who can look back to childhood, and not remember its sorrows and its harrowing fears? I was born with the most imperious, haughty, tameless spirit, with which ever mortal was gifted. I quailed before my father only; and he, generous and noble, but capricious and tyrannical, at once fostered and checked the wild impetuosity of my character, making obedience necessary, but inspiring no respect for the motives which guided his commands. To be a man, free, independent; or, in better words, insolent and domineering, was the hope and prayer of my rebel heart.

My father had one friend, a wealthy Genoese noble, who in a political tumult was suddenly sentenced to banishment, and his property confiscated. The Marchese Torella went into exile alone. Like my father, he was a widower: he had one child, the almost infant Juliet, who was left under my father's guardianship. I should certainly have been an unkind master to the lovely girl, but that I was forced by my position to become her protector. A variety of childish incidents all tended to one point,—to make Juliet see in me a rock of refuge; I in her, one, who must perish through the soft sensibility of her nature too rudely visited, but for my guardian care. We grew up together. The opening rose in May was not more sweet than this dear girl. An irradiation of beauty was spread over her face. Her form, her step, her voice—my heart weeps even now, to think of all of relying, gentle, loving, and pure, that was enshrined in that

celestial tenement. When I was eleven and Juliet eight years of age, a cousin of mine, much older than either—he seemed to us a man—took great notice of my playmate; he called her his bride, and asked her to marry him. She refused, and he insisted, drawing her unwillingly towards him. With the countenance and emotions of a maniac I threw myself on him —I strove to draw his sword —I clung to his neck with the ferocious resolve to strangle him: he was obliged to call for assistance to disengage himself from me. On that night I led Juliet to the chapel of our house: I made her touch the sacred relics—I harrowed her child's heart, and profaned her child's lips with an oath, that she would be mine, and mine only.

Well, those days passed away. Torella returned in a few years, and became wealthier and more prosperous than ever. When I was seventeen, my father died; he had been magnificent to prodigality; Torella rejoiced that my minority would afford an opportnuity for repairing my fortunes. Juliet and I had been affianced beside my father's deathbed—Torella was to be a second parent to me.

I desired to see the world, and I was indulged. I went to Florence, to Rome, to Naples; thence I passed to Toulon, and at length reached what had long been the bourne of my wishes, Paris. There was wild work in Paris then. The poor king, Charles the Sixth, now sane, now mad, now a monarch, now an abject slave, was the very mockery of humanity. The queen, the dauphin, the Duke of Burgundy, alternately friends and foes —now meeting in prodigal feasts, now shedding blood in rivalry—were blind to the miserable state of their country, and the dangers that impended over it, and gave themselves wholly up to dissolute enjoyment or savage strife. My character still followed me. I was arrogant and self-willed; I loved display, and above all, I threw all control far from me. Who could control me in Paris? My young friends were eager to foster passions which furnished them with pleasures. I was handsome—I was master of every knightly accomplishment. I was disconnected with any political party. I grew a favourite with all: my presumption and arrogance was pardoned in one so young: I became a spoiled child. Who could control me? not the letters and advice of Torella—only strong necessity visiting

me in the abhorred shape of an empty purse. But there were means to refill this void. Acre after acre, estate after estate, I sold. My dress, my jewels, my horses and their caparisons, were almost unrivalled in gorgeous Paris, while the lands of my inheritance passed into possession of others.

The Duke of Orleans was waylaid and murdered by the Duke of Burgundy. Fear and terror possessed all Paris. The dauphin and the queen shut themselves up; every pleasure was suspended. I grew weary of this state of things, and my heart yearned for my boyhood's haunts. I was nearly a beggar, yet still I would go there, claim my bride, and rebuild my fortunes. A few happy ventures as a merchant would make me rich again. Nevertheless, I would not return in humble guise. My last act was to dispose of my remaining estate near Albaro for half its worth, for ready money. Then I despatched all kinds of artificers, arras, furniture of regal spendour, to fit up the last relic of my inheritance, my palace in Genoa. I lingered a little longer yet, ashamed at the part of the prodigal returned, which I feared I should play. I sent my horses. One matchless Spanish jennet I despatched to my promised bride; its caparisons flamed with jewels and cloth of gold. In every part I caused to be entwined the intials of Juliet and her Guido. My present found favour in hers and in her father's eyes.

Still to return a proclaimed spendthrift, the mark of impertinent wonder, perhaps of scorn, and to encounter singly the reproaches or taunts of my fellow-citizens, was no alluring prospect. As a shield between me and censure, I invited some few of the most reckless of my comrades to accompany me: thus I went armed against the world, hiding a rankling feeling, half fear and half penitence, by bravado and an insolent display of satisfied vanity.

I arrived in Genoa. I trod the pavement of my ancestral palace. My proud step was no interpreter of my heart, for I deeply felt that, though surrounded by every luxury, I was a beggar. The first step I took in claiming Juliet must widely declare me such. I read contempt or pity in the looks of all. I fancied, so apt is conscience to imagine what it reserves, that rich and poor, young and old, all regarded me with derision. Torella came not near me. No wonder that my second father should expect a son's defer-

ence from me in waiting first on him. But, galled and stung by a sense of my follies and demerit, I strove to throw the blame on others. We kept nightly orgies in Palazzo Carega. To sleepless, riotous nights, followed listless, supine mornings. At the Ave Maria we showed our dainty persons in the streets, scoffing at the sober citizens, casting insolent glances on the shrinking women. Juliet was not among them—no, no; if she had been there, shame would have driven me away, if love had not brought me to her feet.

I grew tired of this. Suddenly I paid the Marchese a visit. He was at his villa, one among the many which deck the suburb of San Pietro d'Arena. It was the month of May—a month of May in that garden of the world—the blossoms of the fruit trees were fading among thick, green foliage; the vines were shooting forth; the ground strewed with the fallen olive blooms; the fire-fly was in the myrtle hedge; heaven and earth wore a mantle of surpassing beauty. Torella welcomed me kindly, though seriously; and even his shade of displeasure soon wore away. Some resemblance to my father—some look and tone of youthful ingenuousness, lurking still in spite of my misdeeds, softened the good old man's heart. He sent for his daughter—he presented me to her as her betrothed. The chamber became hallowed by a holy light as she entered. Hers was that cherub look, those large, soft eyes, full dimpled cheeks, and mouth of infantine sweetness, that expresses the rare union of happiness and love. Admiration first possessed me; she is mine! was the second proud emotion, and my lips curled with haughty triumph. I had not been the *enfant gâté* of the beauties of France not to have learnt the art of pleasing the soft heart of woman. If towards men I was overbearing, the deference I paid to them was the more in contrast. I commenced my courtship by the display of a thousand gallantries to Juliet, who, vowed to me from infancy, had never admitted the devotion of others; and who, though accustomed to expressions of admiration, was uninitiated in the language of lovers.

For a few days all went well. Torella never alluded to my extravagance; he treated me as a favourite son. But the time came, as we discussed the preliminaries to my union with his daughter, when this fair face of things should

be overcast. A contract had been drawn up in my father's lifetime. I had rendered this, in fact, void, by having squandered the whole of the wealth which was to have been shared by Juliet and myself. Torella, in consequence, chose to consider this bond as cancelled, and proposed another, in which, though the wealth he bestowed was immeasurably increased, there were so many restrictions as to the mode of spending it, that I, who saw independence only in free career being given to my own imperious will, taunted him as taking advantage of my situation, and refused utterly to subscribe to his conditions. The old man mildly strove to recall me to reason. Roused pride became the tyrant of my thought: I listened with indignation—I repelled him with disclaim.

"Juliet, thou art mine! Did we not interchange vows in our innocent childhood? are we not one in the sight of God? and shall thy cold-hearted, cold-blooded father divide us- Be generous, my love, be just; take not away a gift, last reasure of thy Guido—retract not thy vows—let us defy the world, and setting at nought the calculations of age, find in our mutual affection a refuge from every ill."

Fiend I must have been, with such sophistry to endeavour to poison that sanctuary of holy thought and tender love. Juliet shrank from me affrighted. Her father was the best and kindest of men, and she strove to show me how, in obeying him, every good would follow. He would receive my tardy submission with warm affection; and generous pardon would follow my repentance. Profitless words for a young and gentle daughter to use to a man accustomed to make his will, law; and to feel in his own heart a despot so terrible and stern, that he could yield obedience to nought save his own imperious desires! My resentment grew with resistance; my wild companions were ready to add fuel to the flame. We laid a plan to carry off Juliet. At first it appeared to be crowned with success. Midway, on our return, we were overtaken by the agonized father and his attendants. A conflict ensued. Before the city guard came to decide the victory in favour of our antagonists, two of Torella's servitors were dangerously wounded.

This portion of my history weighs most heavily with me. Changed man as I am, I abhor myself in the recollection. May none who hear this tale ever have felt as I. A horse driven

to fury by a rider armed with barbed spurs, was not more a slave than I, to the violent tyranny of my temper. A fiend possessed my soul, irritating it to madness. I felt the voice of conscience within me; but if I yielded to it for a brief interval, it was only to be a moment after torn, as by a whirlwind, a w a y — borne along on the stream of desperate rage—the plaything of the storms engendered by pride. I was imprisoned, and, at the instance of Torella, set free. Again I returned to carry off both him and his child to France; which hapless country, then preyed on by freebooters and gangs of lawless soldiery, offered a grateful refuge to a criminal like me. Our plots were discovered. I was sentenced to banishment; and, as my debts were already enormous, my remaining property was put in the hands of commissioners for their payment. Torella again offered his mediation, requiring only my promise not to renew my abortive attempts on himself and his daughter. I spurned his offers, and fancied that I trimphed when I was thrust out from Genoa, a solitary and penniless exile. My companions were gone: they had been dismissed the city some weeks before, and were already in France. I was alone—friendless; with nor sword at my side, nor ducat in my purse.

I wandered along the seashore, a whirlwind of passion possessing and tearing my soul. It was as if a live coal had been set burning in my breast. At first I meditated on what *I should do.* I would join a band of freebooters. Revenge!—the word seemed balm to me:—I hugged it—caressed it—till, like a serpent, it stung me. Then again I would adjure and despise Genoa, that little corner of the world. I would return to Paris, where so many of my friends swarmed; where my services would be eagerly accepted; where I would carve out fortune with my sword, and might, through success, make my paltry birth-place, and the false Torella, rue the day when they drove me, a new Coriolanus, from her walls. I would return to Paris —thus, on foot— a beggar— and present myself in my poverty to those I had formerly entertained sumptuously? There was gall in the mere thought of it.

The reality of things began to dawn upon my mind, bringing despair in its train. For several months I had been a prisoner: the evils of my dungeon had whipped my soul to madness, but they had sub-

dued my corporeal frame. I was weak and wan. Torella had used a thousand artifices to administer to my comfort; I had detected and scorned them all—and I reaped the harvest of my obduracy. What was to be done?—Should I crouch before my foe, and sue for forgiveness?—Die rather ten thousand deaths!—Never should they obtain that victory! Hate—I swore eternal hate! Hate from whom?—to whom?—From a wandering outcast—to a mighty noble. I and my feelings were nothing to them: already had they forgotten one so unworthy. And Juliet!—her angel-face and sylph-like form gleamed among the clouds of my despair with vain beauty; for I had lost her—the glory and flower of the world! Another will call her his!—that smile of paradise will bless another!

Even now my heart fails within me when I recur to this rout of grim-visaged ideas. Now subdued almost to tears, now raving in my agony, still I wandered along the rocky shore, which grew at each step wilder and more desolate. Hanging rocks and hoary precipices overlooked the tideless ocean; black caverns yawned; and for ever, among the seaworn recesses, murmured and dashed the unfruitful waters. Now my way was almost barred by an abrupt promontory, now rendered nearly impracticable by fragments fallen from the cliff. Evening was at hand, when, seaward, arose, as if on the waving of a wizard's wand, a murky web of clouds, blotting the late azure sky, and darkening and disturbing the till now placid deep. The clouds had strange fantastic shapes; and they changed, and mingled, and seemed to be driven about by a mighty spell. The waves raised their white crests; the thunder first muttered, then roared from across the waste of waters, which took a deep purple dye, flecked with foam. The spot where I stood, looked, on one side, to the wide-spread ocean; on the other, it was barred by a rugged promontory. Round this cape suddenly came, driven by the wind, a vessel. In vain the mariners tried to force a path for her to the open sea—the gale drove her on the rocks. It will perish!—all on board will perish!—Would I were among them! And to my young heart the idea of death came for the first time blended with that of joy. It was an awful sight to behold that vessel struggling with her fate. Hardly could I discern the sailors, but I heard them. It was soon all over!—A rock, just covered by the

tossing waves, and so unperceived, lay in wait for its prey. A crash of thunder broke over my head at the moment that, with a frightful shock, the skiff dashed upon her unseen enemy. In a brief space of time she went to pieces. There I stood in safety; and there were my fellow-creatures, battling, how hopelessly, with annihilation. Me-thought I saw them struggling—too truly did I hear their shrieks, conquering the barking surges in their shrill agony. The dark breakers threw hither and thither the fragments of the wreck: soon it disappeared. I had been fascinated to gaze till the end: at last I sank on my knees—I covered my face with my hands: I again looked up; something was floating on the billows towards the shore. It neared and neared. Was that a human form?—It grew more distinct; and at last a mighty wave, lifting the whole freight, lodged it upon a rock. A human being bestriding a sea-chest!—A human being! —Yet was it one? Surely never such had existed before —a misshapen dwarf, with squinting eyes, distorted features, and body deformed, till it became a horror to behold. My blood, lately warming towards a fellow-being so snatched from a watery tomb, froze in my heart. The dwarf got off his chest; he tossed his straight, straggling hair from his odious visage:

"By St. Beelzebub!" he exclaimed, "I have been well bested." He looked round and saw me. "Oh, by the fiend! here is another ally of the mighty one. To what saint did you offer prayers, friend—if not to mine? Yet I remember you not on board."

I shrank from the monster and his blasphemy. Again he questioned me, and I muttered some inaudible reply. He continued:—

"Your voice is drowned by this dissonant roar. What a noise the big ocean makes! Schoolboys bursting from their prison are not louder than these waves set free to play. They disturb me. I will no more of their ill-timed brawling. — Silence, hoary One! — Winds, avaunt! — to your homes!—Clouds, fly to the antipodes, and leave our heaven clear!"

As he spoke, he stretched out his two long lank arms, that looked like spider's claws, and seemed to embrace with them the expanse before him. Was it a miracle? The clouds became broken, and fled; the azure sky first peeped out, and then was spread a calf field of blue above us; the stormy gale was exchanged to the softly breathing west; the

sea grew clam; the waves dwindled to riplets.

"I like obedience even in these stupid elements," said the dwarf. "How much more in the tameless mind of man! It was a well got up storm, you must allow—and all of my own making."

It was tempting Providence to interchange talk with this magician. But *Power*, in all its shapes, is venerable to man. Awe, curiosity, a clinging fascination, drew me towards him.

"Come, don't be frightened, friend," said the wretch: "I am good - humoured when pleased; and something does please me in your well-proportioned body and handsome face, though you look a little woe-begone. You have suffered a land—I, a sea wreck. Perhaps I can allay the tempest of your fortunes as I did my own. Shall we be friends?" —And he held out his hand; I could not touch it. "Well, then, companions—that will do as well. And now, while I rest after the buffeting I underwent just now tell me why you wander thus alone and downcast on this wild seashore."

The voice of the wretch was screeching and horrid, and his contortions as he spoke were frightful to behold. Yet he did gain a kind of influence over me, which I could not master, and I told him my tale. When it was ended, he laughed long and loud: the rocks echoed back the sound: hell seemed yelling around me.

"Oh, thou cousin of Lucifer!" said he; "so thou too hast fallen through thy pride; and, though bright as the son of Morning, thou art ready to give up thy good looks, thy bride, and thy well-being, rather than submit thee to the tyranny of good. I honour thy choice, by my soul!—So thou hast fled, and yield the day; and mean to starve on these rocks, and to let the birds peck out thy dead eyes, while thy enemy and thy betrothed rejoice in thy ruin. Thy pride is strangely akin to humility, methinks."

As he spoke, a thousand fanged thoughts stung me to the heart.

"What would you that I should do?" I cried.

"I!—Oh, nothing, but lie down and say your prayers before you die. But, were I you, I know the deed that should be done."

I drew near him. His supernatural powers made him an oracle in my eyes; yet a strange unearthly thrill quivered through my frame as I said—"Speak!—teach me—What act do you advise?"

"Revenge thyself, man!—

humble thy enemies!—set thy foot on the old man's neck, and possess thyself of his daughter!"

"To the east and west I turn," cried I, "and see no means! Had I gold, much could I achieve; but, poor and single, I am powerless."

The dwarf had been seated on his chest as he listened to my story. Now he got off; he touched a spring; it flew open! —What a mine of wealth—of blazing jewels, beaming gold, and pale silver—was displayed therein. A mad desire to possess this treasure was born within me.

"Doubtless," I said, "one so powerful as you could do all things."

"Nay," said the monster, humbly, "I am less omnipotent than I seem. Some things I possess which you may covet; but I would give them all for a small share, or even for a loan of what is yours."

"My possessions are at your service," I replied, bitterly— "my poverty, my exile, my disgrace—I make a free gift of them all."

"Good! I thank you. Add one other thing to your gift, and my treasure is yours."

"As nothing is my sole inheritance, what besides nothing would you have?"

"Your comely face and well made limbs."

I shivered. Would this all-powerful monster murder me? I had no dagger. I forgot to pray—but I grew pale.

"I ask for a loan, not a gift," said the frightful thing: "lend me your body for three days—you shall have mine to cage your soul the while, and, in payment, my chest. What say you to the bargain?— Three short days."

We are told that it is dangerous to hold unlawful talk; and well do I prove the same. Tamely written down, it may seem incredible that I should lend any ear to this proposition; but, in spite of his unnatural ugliness, there was something fascinating in a being whose voice could govern earth, air, and sea. I felt a keen desire to comply; for with that chest I could command the world. My only hesitation resulted from a fear that he would not be true to his bargain. Then, I thought, I shall soon die here on these lonely sands, and the limbs he covets will be mine no more: —it is worth the chance. And, besides, I knew that, by all the rules of art-magic, there were formula and oaths which none of its practisers dared break. I hesitated to reply; and he went on, now displaying his wealth, now speaking of the petty price he demanded, till it seemed mad-

ness to refuse. Thus is it: place our bark in the current of the stream, and down, over fall and cataract it is hurried; give up our conduct to the wild torrent of passion, and we are away, we know not whither.

He swore many an oath, and I adjured him by many a sacred name; still I saw this wonder of power, this ruler of the elements, shiver like an autumn leaf before my words; and as if the spirit spake unwillingly and per force within him, at last, he, with broken voice, revealed the spell whereby he might be obliged, did he wish to play me false, to render up the unlawful spoil. Our warm life-blood must mingle to make and to mar the charm.

Enough of this unholy theme. I was persuaded—the thing was done. The morrow dawned upon me as I lay upon the shingles, and I knew not my own shadow as it fell from me. I felt myself changed to a shape of horror, and cursed my easy faith and blind credulity. The chest was there—there the gold and precious stones for which I had sold the frame of flesh which nature had given me. The sight a little stilled my emotions: three days would soon be gone.

They did pass. The dwarf had supplied me with a plenteous store of food. At first I could hardly walk, so strange and out of joint were all my limbs; and my voice—it was that of the fiend. But I kept silent, and turned my face to the sun, that I might not see my shadow, and counted the hours, and ruminated on my future conduct. To bring Torella to my feet—to possess my Juliet in spite of him—all this my wealth could easily achieve. During dark night I slept, and dreamt of the accomplishment of my desires. Two suns had set—the third dawned. I was agitated, fearful. Oh expectation, what a frightful thing art thou, when kindled more by fear than hope! How dost thou twist thyself round the heart, torturing its pulsations! How dost thou dart unknown pangs all through our feeble mechanism, now seeming to shiver us like broken glass, to nothingness—now giving us a fresh strength, which can *do* nothing, and so torments us by a sensation, such as the strong man must feel who cannot break his fetters, though they bend in his grasp. Slowly paced the bright, bright orb up the eastern sky; long it lingered in the zenith, and still more slowly wandered down the west: it touched the horizon's were—it was lost!

Its glories were on the summits of the cliff—they grew dun and gray. The evening star shone bright. He will soon be here.

He came not!—By the living heavens, he came not!—and night dragged out its weary length, and, in its decaying age, "day began to grizzle its dark hair;" and the sun rose again on the most miserable wretch that ever upbraided its light. Three days thus I passed. The jewels and the gold—oh, how I abhorred them!

Well, well—I will not blacken these pages with demoniac ravings. All too terrible were the thoughts, the raging tumult of ideas that filled my soul. At the end of that time I slept; I had not before since the third sunset; and I dreamt that I was at Juliet's feet, and she smiled, and then she shrieked—for she saw my transformation—and again she smiled, for still her beautiful lover knelt before her. But it was not I—it was he, the fiend, arrayed in my limbs, speaking with my voice, winning her with my looks of love. I strove to warn her, but my tongue refused its office; I strove to tear him from her, but I was rooted to the agony. There were the solitary hoary precipices—there the splashing sea, the quiet strand, and the blue sky over all. What did it mean? was my dream but a mirror of the truth? was he wooing and winning my betrothed? I would on the instant back to Genoa—but I was banished. I laughed—the dwarf's yell burst from my lips—*I* banished! O, no! they had not exiled the foul limbs I wore; I might with these enter, without fear of incurring the threatened penalty of death, my own, my native city.

I began to walk towards Genoa. I was somewhat accustomed to my distorted limbs; none were ever so ill adapted for a straight-forward movement; it was with infinite difficulty that I proceeded. Then, too, I desired to avoid all the hamlets strewed here and there on the seabeach, for I was unwilling to make a display of my hideousness. I was not quite sure that, if seen, the mere boys would not stone me to death as I passed, for a monster: some ungentle salutations I did receive from the few peasants or fishermen I chanced to meet. But it was dark night before I approached Genoa. The weather was so balmy and sweet that it struck me that the Marchese and his daughter would very probably have quitted the city for their country re-

treat. It was from Villa Torella that I had attempted to carry off Juliet; I had spent many an hour reconnoitering the spot, and knew each inch of ground in its vicinity. It was beautifully situated, embosomed in trees, on the margin of a stream. As I drew near, it became evident that my conjecture was right; nay, moreover, that the hours were being then devoted to feasting and merriment. For the house was lighted up; strains of soft and gay music were wafted towards me by the breeze. My heart sank within me. Such was the generous kindness of Torella's heart that I felt sure that he would not have indulged in public manifestations of rejoicing just after my unfortunate banishment, but for a cause of I dared not dwell upon.

The country people were all alive and flocking about; it became necessary that I should study to conceal myself; and yet I longed to address some one, or to hear others discourse, or in any way to gain inteligence of what was really going on. At length, entering the walks that were in immediate vicinity to the mansion, I found one dark enough to veil my excessive frightfulness; and yet others as well as I were loitering in its shade. I soon gathered all I wanted to know—all that first made my very heart die with horror, and then boil with indignation. To-morrow Juliet was to be given to the penitent, reformed, beloved Guido—to-morrow my bride was to pledge her vows to a fiend from hell! And I did this!—my accursed pride—my demoniac violence and wicked self-idolatry had caused this act. For if I had acted as the wretch who had stolen my form had acted—if, with a mien at once yielding and dignified, I had presented myself to Torella, saying, I have done wrong, forgive me; I am unworthy of your angelchild, but permit me to claim her hereafter, when my altered conduct shall manifest that I adjure my vices, and endeavour to become in some sort worthy of her. I go to serve against the infidels; and when my zeal for religion and my true penitence for the past shall appear to you to cancel my crimes, permit me again to call myself your son. Thus had he spoken; and the penitent was welcomed even as the prodigal son of scripture: the fatted calf was killed for him; and he, still pursuing the same path, displayed such open-hearted regret for his follies, so humble a con-

cession of all his rights, and so ardent a resolve to reacquire them by a life of contrition and virtue, that he quickly conquered the kind, old man; and full pardon, and the gift of his lovely child, followed in swift succession.

Oh; Had an angel from Paradise whispered to me to act thus! But now, what would be the innocent Juliet's fate? Would God permit the foul union—or, some prodigy destroying it, link the dishonoured name of Carega with the worst of crimes? Tomorrow at dawn they were to be married: there was but one way to prevent this—to meet mine enemy, and to enforce the ratification of our agreement. I felt that this could only be done by a mortal struggle. I had no sword —if indeed my distorted arms could wield a soldier's weapon—but I had a dagger, and in that lay my every hope. There was no time for pondering or balancing nicely the question: I might die in the attempt; but besides the burning jealousy and despair of my own heart, honour, mere humanity, demanded that I should fall rather than not destroy the machinations of the fiend.

The guests departed—the lights began to disappear; it was evident that the inhabitants of the villa were seeking repose. I hid myself among the trees—the garden grew deserted—the gates were closed— wandered round and came under a window—ah! well did I know the same!— a soft twilight glimmered in the room—the curtains were half withdrawn. It was the temple of innocence and beauty. Its magnificence was tempered, as it were, by the slight disarrangements occasioned by its being dwelt in, and all the objects scattered around displayed the taste of her who hallowed it by her presence. I saw her enter with a quick light step—I saw her approach the window—she drew back the curtain yet further, and looked out into the night. Its breezy freshness played among her ringlets, and wafted them from the transparent marble of her brow. She clasped her hands, she raised her eyes to Heaven. I heard her voice. Guido! she softly murmured, Mine own Guido! and then, as if overcome by the fullness of her own heart, she sank on her knees:—her raised eyes— her negligent but graceful attitude—the beaming thankfulness that lighted up her face—oh, these are tame words! Heart of mine, thou imagest ever, though thou canst not portray, the celes-

tial beauty of that child of light and love.

I heard a step—a quick firm step along the shady avenue. Soon I saw a cavalier, richly dressed, young and, methought, graceful to look on, advance.—I hid myself yet closer.—The youth approached; he paused beneath the window. She arose, and again looking out she saw him, and said—I cannot, no, at this distant time I cannot record her terms of soft silver tenderness; to me they were spoken, but they were replied to by him.

"I will not go," he cried: "here where you have been, where your memory glides like some Heaven-visiting ghost, I will pass the long hours till we meet, never, my Juliet, again, day or night, to part. But do thou, my love, retire; the cold morn and fitful breeze will make thy cheek pale, and fill with languor thy love-lighted eyes. Ah, sweetest! could I press one kiss upon them, I could, methinks, repose."

And then he approached still nearer, and methought he was about to clamber into her chamber. I had hesitated, not to terrify her; now I was no longer master of myself. I rushed forward—I threw myself on him—I tore him away—I cried, "O loathsome and foul-shaped wretch!"

I need not repeat epithets, all tending, as it appeared, to rail at a person I at present feel some partiality for. A shriek rose from Juliet's lips. I neither heard nor saw—I *felt* only mine enemy, whose throat I grasped, and my dagger's hilt; he struggled, but could not escape: at length hoarsely he breathed these words: "Do!—strike home! destroy this body—you will still live: may your life be long and merry!"

The descending dagger was arrested at the word, and he, feeling my hold relax, extricated himself and drew his sword, while the uproar in the house, and flying of torches from one room to the other, showed that soon we should be separated—and I—oh! far better die: so that he did not survive, I cared not. In the midst of my frenzy there was much calculation:—fall I might, and so that he did not survive, I cared not for the death-blow I might deal against myself. While still, therefore, he thought I paused, and while I saw the villanous resolve to take advantage of my hesitation, in the sudden thrust he made at me, I threw myself on his sword, and at the same moment plunged my dagger, with a true desperate aim, in

his side. We fell together, rolling over each other, and the tide of blood that flowed from the gaping wound of each mingled on the grass. More I know not—I fainted.

Again I returned to life: weak almost to death, I found myself stretched upon a bed—Juliet was kneeling beside it. Strange! my first broken request was for a mirror. I was so wan and ghastly, that my poor girl hesitated, as she told me afterwards; but, by the mass! I thought myself a right proper youth when I saw the dear reflection of my own well-known features. I confess it is a weakness, but I avow it, I do entertain a considerable affection for the countenance and limbs I behold, whenever I look at a glass; and have more mirrors in my house, and consult them oftener than any beauty in Venice. Before you too much condemn me, permit me to say that no one better knows than I the value of his own body; no one, probably, except myself, ever having had it stolen from him.

Incoherently I at first talked of the dwarf and his crimes, and reproached Juliet for her too easy admission of his love. She thought me raving, as well she might, and yet it was some time before I could prevail on myself to admit that the Guido whose penitence had won her back for me was myself; and while I cursed bitterly the monstrous dwarf, and blest the well-directed blow that had deprived him of life, I suddenly checked myself when I heard her say—Amen! knowing that him whom she reviled was my very self. A little reflection taught me silence—a little practice enabled me to speak of that frightful night without any very excessive blunder. The wound I had given myself was no mockery of one—it was long before I recovered—and as the benevolent and generous Torella sat beside me, talking such wisdom as might win friends to repentance, and mine own dear Juliet hovered near me, administering to my wants, and cheering me by her smiles, the work of my bodily cure and mental reform went on together. I have never, indeed, wholly recovered my strength—my cheek is paler since—my person a little bent. Juliet sometimes ventures to allude bitterly to the malice that caused this change, but I kiss her on the moment, and tell her all is for the best. I am a fonder and more faithful husband—and true is this—but for that wound, never had I called her mine.

I did not revisit the seashore, nor seek for the fiend's

treasure; yet, while I ponder on the past, I often think, and my confessor was not backward in favouring the idea, that it might be a good rather than an evil spirit, sent by my guardian angel, to show me the folly and misery of pride. So well at least did I learn this lesson, roughly taught as I was, that I am known now by all my friends and fellow-citizens by the name of Guido il Cortese.

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death by the alphabet

by Y. N. ibn Aharon, B.D.

The magical virtues of the letters of the alphabet is a fact of ancient religion well-attested by many scholars, and most notably by Robert Graves in his definitive study of *The White Goddess*. Alphabets were, in ancient times, almost exclusively the property of the priests, and were used mostly to write things of a religious nature, especially prayers, incantations, lamentations and official histories designed to enlist the co-operation of the people as a whole on behalf of those "most favoured of the gods."

In the ancient Middle East, the magic of the letters of the alphabet was much enhanced by the fact that each letter was also a number, and hence possessed not only a phonetic, but also an arithmetical relationship to the other letters of the alphabet. "A" for example had a numerical value of one, while its nearest phonetic relative, the guttural "A" called Ayin had a value of seventy. By taking A and guttural-A, and adding the second vowel of the Semitic alphabet (U with a value of six) the magic number seventy-seven might be obtained. It was obviously to most people of the ancient Middle East that the numerical value of their name was at least as important as its sound (when read phonetically) or its meaning (when analyzed linguistically). This is one reason why we found so many written vowels in Assyrian and Babylonian names, in spite of the fact that the vowels were usually unwritten or contained within the consonants themselves to make what is called a syllabic alphabet, or syllabary.

The Mandaean tribes, in Western Iraq, call themselves the Christians of Saint John, and they think of Saint John as being *their* apostle in much the same way that the Spaniards think of Saint James as the apostle of all Iberia, or the Syrian Christians of South India identify themselves with Saint Thomas. The literature of the Christians of Saint John was first brought to Europe by a Portuguese missionary in 1423, but the language did not become fully intelligible to European students until the publication of the early Syriac (or Chaldean) grammars in the Sixteenth Century.

At that time, it was remarked that the Mandean had a special alphabet, which was used for ceremonial purposes only, and which ordinary people would not reproduce even under pain of death. The one outstanding feature of this alphabet is that

its first and last letters are identical. They are both in the form of a circle, although the first has a phonetic value of soft "A" and the last of an aspirated "T". But although the literature is full of a good many hints as to the reason why a Mandean adult would rather suffer death than knowingly reveal the letters of the ceremonial alphabet, they do not seem to have come to an obvious conclusion in this connection; that the alphabet in Mandea is universally believed to be a deadly weapon—in more ways than one—capable of achieving everything for those who know how to put it to the right uses.

The first thing the magician does is to cause the victim's name to be carved on the end of a stick made from the wood of the gofrit tree. A circle is then formed around the altar fire and a dance begins to the tune of a dirge, forming the words, "He shall cease to exist in the sight of God. His soul shall be cast into darkness. He shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. His name shall be no more, his name shall be no more, his name shall be no more." Then the staff or wand with the victim's name is cast into the fire, where the priest prods the ashes with a red Satan-stick and causes the participants to spit into the fire, each one declaiming the admonitory curse. "And his name shall be no more."

A litter of saqam wood is made using a garment of the victim as the stretcher. It is filled with pebbles, one blue pebble for each unit of numerical value in the victim's personal name and one yellow pebble for each unit of numerical value in his father's name. The pebbles are then taken and buried in the family plot of the victim, and represent the end of his existence in the eyes of the official religion. From that time on, he can no longer participate in the rites of the Mandean church, his wife is considered as an unmarried virgin, and his children are said to be the offspring of an uncle, or perhaps of their grandfather, except in cases where the whole family has fallen under the interdict. And being officially already a dead man, there can be no punishment for the murder of such a man. The value of his name has been calculated according to the letters of the secret alphabet; to the literal value of his name has been added the numerical value of his birth date in the Mandaean calendar. This was then multiplied by the birthdate of his father, less seven times the birthdate of his mother. This number, in the form of sacrificial pebbles, had then been accursed and buried. The fact that the man himself was still capable of walking and talking meant nothing to his friends and family. He had, in a startling literal sense, lost his good name—and there wasn't much he could do to get it back again.

murder-go-round

by H. Bedford Jones

HARPER was, at the moment, acting as Paris correspondent for a string of Canadian newspapers. He was a cheerful and irresponsible sort, quite capable of galloping off to Moscow or Rome and sending over some story that would get him in the jug and lose him his job. The story, however, would be entirely true. That was the difference betwen Harper and some of the other boys.

Escaping from a deadly reception for some visiting notables and brass hats, Harper dutifully filed his story and then wandered out on the boulevards to enjoy himself. He settled down at the little café at the upper end of the Avenue Marigny, and was on his second "demi" when fate, always lavish in her attentions to him, sauntered up and hit him in the eye. To be more accurate, an extremely good-looking young woman came past, took one look at him as he sat among the potted box-plants, and immediately turned and came straight to his table.

The incredibly gifted and prolific H. Bedford Jones was a name to conjure with in the old days. I think many of you must remember his continuation of the D'Artagnan saga . . . In the Nov. 1963 SMM *we reprinted his recreation of the first meeting between Cleopatra (the earlier Cleopatra . . .) and Mark Anthony. Here is an earlier adventure story, set in Paris.*

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"Aren't you Mr. Harper?" she inquired in English, as he rose in some astonishment.

"No," he said cherefully. "Not to you. Never! I'm just plain Harp, like I am to the rest of the gang. This is excellent beer, and strong. The chairs are comfortable. It is going to rain before dark, and your accent says you're English. So that means tea, and they're rather good at that sort of thing here—"

"Please be serious!" she broke in quickly.

"I am," returned Harper, holding back a chair. "That's better. I'm always serious—"

"You were with the Canadian Commissioner this afternoon. Some one was speaking of you, and I wanted to ask you about it then, but you had gone before I found some one to—"

"Wait, w a i t!" Harper dropped into his chair, a whimsical laugh in his eyes. "Nobody spoke any good of me, that's certain. But you can't ask me about it, really; you seem to be the right sort of girl, and so you couldn't ask me about it—"

A hint of anger rose into her steady gaze.

"Are you impertinent because I came up to you, like this—a stranger—"

Harper sighed, and got out his cigarettes.

"Impertinent! No. I'm just myself, young lady. I say what I think, drink when I feel like it, swear frequently, enjoy the wrong sort of people, and things like that. You don't know how good it is to cast off all posing! Nobody will say anything good about me, and I'm not a bit worried. What's on your mind? Trouble?"

"Real trouble," she said quietly, and settled back in her chair. The trace of anger cleared from her face; a strong face, thought Harper, very pleasant, well-poised, healthy. The sort of face men in Paris would look at twice in passing.

"Every one thinks his own trouble is real, until he finds what's troubling his neighbor," observed Harper. "Then he wouldn't trade places."

"Mine is really real," she said. "I heard about it during the reception. He's dead, they say—"

"Eh?" Harper saw the swift, deep pain in her dark eyes, and straightened up. He liked those eyes. His air of negligent, cool confidence disappeared. His gray, steady gaze became serious. "Who is dead?"

"A friend," she said quietly. "A very dear friend. Stephen Hobart."

Harper beckoned the waiter

and gave him a sharp order for cognac. He saw, suddenly, that beneath the apparent poise of this girl was a chaotic whirlpool of emotion. The cognac came immediately, and he placed it in her hand.

"Drink, please! Put it down. Medicine, and you need it. Then we'll talk."

She nodded, swallowed the fiery liquid, and grimaced. Then she accepted the cigarette he proffered, but he saw that her fingers were trembling.

"First," he said, "just who is Stephen Hobart?"

"A Canadian," she replied. "That's why I thought that you—"

"Chuck it," he broke in. "Get back on the track. Who is he? What does he do?"

"He was a bank clerk, until last month," she said impatiently. "In the branch of the Royal Chartered Bank here. My father's the manager; we became acquainted. He had a chance to go in with Morpen et Cie., the wholesale jewelers, as confidential agent. It meant a good deal. He traveled between there and Amsterdam, where their headquarters are located. He was to meet us for luncheon, but did not come. Some one told father, at the reception, that he'd been killed this morning. Aboard the train from Amsterdam."

"I'm sorry," said Harper, regarding her gravely. "How could I be of any help?"

"They say a newspaper man can do anything. I've tried to make myself go, and can't; I've been walking about the streets, and haven't the courage. But they must be taken from his apartment! He wrote me they were lying there on his table in a brief case."

"Yes?" said Harper. "What were?"

Fright struggled in her eyes with the impulse to confide in him.

"Confidential? W o r d of honor."

"The letters." She broke into rapid speech. "Confidential letters, in bank code, to my father. From the Bank of England, dealing with gold movements. They were important, they meant everything; if Stephen could decode them, he could act at once, make a lot of money. We could be married. Oh, I was mad, mad! I know it was all my fault. I took them and sent them to him. He had to go to Amsterdam at once. My father thinks they're lost—we've had a terrible time about it—"

Harper took out pencil and paper. "His address?"

"Fifty-three, rue de Provence. Third floor. If we—"

"Your address?"

"Rue Jasmin. Twenty-five, Bis. But you don't know my name—June Collier—"

Harper rose, dropped a five-franc note on the table, beckoned.

"Come along. There's no time to lose. Quickly!"

He led her out to the curb, where a taxi driver stuffed away his newspaper at their approach and held open the cab door. He handed her in.

"Now, you're going straight home," he said quietly. "And stay there. Wait for me. I'll be along some time this evening with the letters."

Before she could protest, he gave the driver her address, and the cab departed. Harper beckoned another cab, gave the address of Hobart's apartment, and relaxed on the cushions.

What fools people were, he reflected sardonically, when love dazzled them! It could blind them to honor, to safety, to everything sane. This girl was emphatically a nice girl, yet she had committed a despicable action, probably on the insistence of Hobart. And, as is sometimes the case, the most incredible, most unlikely, things had happened, and now, if those letters were found in the brief case of Hobart, as they must be, it meant ruin for her father.

He awakened abruptly from his reflections as the cab swung out of the Rue de Lafayette and his destination appeared ahead. He knew what he would find there—cheap, ancient apartments, occupied by bachelors, or as offices. Old buildings, within easy reach of the business district. A moment later the cab drew to a halt.

Harper alighted, paid the driver, entered the open gateway. He passed the lodge of the concierge with a gesture that signified he knew his way. Here was a courtyard, cobble-paved, with rather dingy stairs opening to the left. If the police were not here yet, there was a chance.

Taking the curving stairs two at a time, Harper went up rapidly, without a pause at the landings. At each landing were two doors, with a large window opening on the court. As he came to the third, he perceived that one of the two doors stood open. A man was just leaving, holding a brief case in one hand. Upon the door was the name S. H. Hobart.

Harper's approach was swift, silent. The man in the doorway started back with an exclamation, as Harper ap-

peared before him, thrusting him back into the room.

"What are you doing here?" Harper demanded sharply. A glance showed him that the man was a Frenchman of the lower classes, a scoundrelly looking fellow. "Give me that *portefeuille!*"

As he spoke he snatched the brief case from the startled man, whose quick terror was evident. The fellow dodged aside, ducked under his arm, went out the door like a shot and down the stairs. Harper looked after him in some surprise, and then glanced at the door in sudden comprehension. It had been forced open.

The brief case bore Hobart's name stamped in gold. Harper unbuckled it swiftly, one glance around the sparsely furnished little apartment showing him it was empty. He looked into the first pocket of the brief case and found two letters. They were the ones he sought, and with an exclamation of satisfaction he pocketed them.

Curious to know why the sneak-thief had abstracted this one article, Harper looked through the case. To his astonishment it held nothing else, except a blank and apparently empty envelope. He thrust this into his pocket also, tossed the case back into the next room, and closing the door behind him, turned down the stairs.

As he passed the lodge of the concierge and stepped out to the street, two agents of the police brushed by him and entered. He had been just in time.

About to hail a taxi, Harper changed his mind and turned away. The afternoon was nearly gone. At this hour his quickest way of getting across Paris was by underground, and the near-by Chaussée d'Antin station would let him reach Rue Jasmin directly, on the Porte de St. Cloud line.

In five minutes he had reached the station and descended the wide stairs. The doors were shut—a train was at the platform. He waited until they opened, had his ticket stamped, and passed on down to the first-class space. Another train came roaring in. Harper fought for a place in the surging throng, and caught one swift glimpse of a face and a man near by—an unkempt face, a red neckerchief, rough clothing. It was the man who had fled from Hobart's apartment. Then he was shoved in with the others, and saw nothing more of the thief.

An odd coincidence, he reflected.

His meeting with the two agents, and this encounter with the thief, drove everything else out of his mind. He was glad that the girl's torment would be relieved so swiftly. The Metro stations reeled off rapidly, and presently the train was thundering down below the Avenue Mozart. At Rue Jasmin Harper rose and joined the upward-pressing throng. A new street this, a little street of two blocks, and in a select residence quarter.

Upon reaching the upper level, he had only half a block to walk. Threatening rain had brought twilight before its hour, for it was scarcely five now. The number he sought proved to be a handsome new apartment building, and giving June Collier's name to the concierge, Harper turned to the lift and shot up to the sixth floor.

The girl herself answered the door, and her eyes widened at sight of him.

"You!" she exclaimed. "Not —already? But come in, come in!"

"Thanks, no," said Harper. He took the two letters from his pocket. "Here they are, young lady. No trouble at all—"

"But I must thank you—"

"You must not," he broke in, and turned back to the elevator. "The less said about it the better. Good luck to you!"

He stepped in, closed the doors, and went down—much to the horror of the concierge, who held the Paris notion that no elevator should be used for descent. Smiling at the torrent of language pouring after him, Harper walked out to the street, and turned toward the Metro station.

As he did so, a man accosted him, an unkempt fellow with a red neckerchief, who grinned at his astonished recognition.

"One moment, *m'sieu,*" came the husky voice. "There is a word to be said, if you please."

"What the devil! Followed me, did you?" said Harper.

"Of course, *m'sieu,*" said the other. "Name of a black dog, but you frightened me, back there! I thought you were the police, until I saw them come down below, as you left. So you got it, did you?"

"Got what?" asked Harper. The other laughed.

"Come, come, *m'sieu!* I don't bear you any ill will for that trick; it was a good one, it was! All we want is the receipt, and I have the money ready for you."

"Go to the devil!" said

Harper, and turned. The other blocked his way with a snarl, and Harper caught the glint of steel.

"None of that, *m'sieu!* You don't think I'm alone, do you? Hand it over, or—"

Harper's fist struck the fellow under the ear and sent him careening halfway across the street by way of reply. Then, striding rapidly along without another look, Harper came to the liquor store at the corner, and frowningly turned into the shop. What all this meant he had not the least idea, and desired no dealings with any such rascal as this fellow.

The woman behind the counter smilingly indicated the telephone, and Harper called up the city editor of one of the English papers published in Paris, whom he knew.

"This is Harp on the line," he said. "Tell me if you're heard anything about the death of a chap named Hobart, sometime to-day—"

"Two-column spread in the morning paper, Harp," came the reply.

"Give me the dope on it, will you?"

"Stephen Hobart. Confidential messenger for a jewelry firm. Killed on the express from Amsterdam this morning—murdered and robbed. He was bringing in some recut diamonds for his firm. Close to a million francs' worth.

"All gone and no clew. If you want to put the story on the cables, come along down here before midnight and get the details."

"Thanks, I will," said Harper, and rang off.

Paying for his call, he left the shop and walked across the street to the taxicab rank. A moment later he was bowling along toward his own apartment in Passy, close by. No further sign of the thief had appeared.

Here was startling confirmation of the girl's story, at least. Being bound for the opera that evening, alone, Harper determined to go home and dress, then get down to the newspaper office, get the facts on the murder, cable a brief story about it, and dine at leasure. Everything would work out very neatly.

Then, for the first time, he remembered the blank envelope he had taken from the brief case. Could this be the "receipt" which the thief had been after? Not likely. However, there was certainly something queer about it all. No chance to examine the envelope here, and he was nearly home anyway. He shrugged and let it wait.

When he was back in his

own bachelor apartment, he switched on the lights and reached into his pocket. The envelope, as he had thought, was quite blank.

It was not empty, however. It contained a small folded slip of colored paper. He took this out, opened it, and frowned.

It was a receipt for a sealed package deposited with the Crédit Largier; the package would be delivered only on presentation of this receipt. Hobart's name did not appear.

"This is what the sewer rat was a f t e r — b u t why?" thought Harper. "It must have some value. Hm! The Crédit Largier is one of these little private French financial concerns, half bank and half rascal—over in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Hobart deposited a package there, three days ago, by the date of this receipt. He went to Amsterdam hurriedly, unexpectedly, even before he could get those letters back to that girl. He wrote her where they were, probably from the train he departed on. He was killed on the way back here, this morning, almost at Paris. Hm! Killed and robbed. Before the news was generally known, a sneak-thief was after this receipt. It's a devil of an involved mess!"

One thing was evident—the Collier girl was clear out of it now, knew nothing about this receipt. Her plight had drawn him into the matter, by the queer inconsistency of human events. Harper figured the paper, then thoughtfully removed his wrist watch. He pried off the silver cap of the watch, next his wrist, creased the folded, thin paper into a tight square, and laid it under the replaced cap. A quick pressure, a snap, and it was done.

Harper had an uneasy suspicion that there was something very much amiss. Hobart had wanted money badly and had not been scrupulous about getting it.

Mr. Harper himself, let it be said, was by no means an angel. As he was wont to state at times, he was a roughneck who had lifted himself into a correspondent's job by his bootstraps. He went with a wild crowd, and more than once he had been so close to the inside of a French jail that only the Legion of Honor rosette at his lapel had saved him. But he had done nothing to cause him shame to think over, or that could not be brought forth and related with gusto when occasion offered. And he most heartily despised sneaks.

As he was dressing, his

telephone jingled and he picked up the receiver to hear Bell's hearty tones. Bell was one of the ex-aviating crowd who had made their headquarters at the Clos Normand, and caused the Bois de Boulogne to reëcho once again to the jovialities of Henri Quatre. Bell had a party on for the evening, and wanted Harper in it.

"Can't do it," said Harper. "Feller, I'm off for the opera. They're giving 'Falstaff' tonight and I'd sooner hear it than eat."

"Yeah? Who is the fair dame, Harp?"

"No dame. I'll meet you after the show if you like."

"Done. We'll expect you. By the way, have you got a story on that train murder to-day? The chap was a Canuck, so you ought to have it."

"Haven't got the details yet. I'm picking them up down town in half an hour. Say, was that Hobart chap a friend of yours?"

"Nope, not hardly. I'd met him a couple of times, though."

"Was he on the level or not?"

"Sure," replied Bell. "Pretty responsible job, too. But he had soft spots. I didn't take to him very hard; looked to me like acid would eat into him. Still—we must say only good of the dead, huh? All right, Harp. See you about eleven thirty."

Harper hung up, then called another number and found Foucher at home. Foucher owned his own taxicab, and was a spendid, soldierly man whom Harper accounted among his best friends. As Foucher lived in the vicinity, he usually made use of him and his car when bound for the city. Finding him free for the evening, he arranged for Foucher to pick him up in twenty minutes, and went on with his dressing.

Another ten minutes passed. Harper struggled into his dress shirt and was putting the right touch on his black tie when the speaking tube whistled. The concierge was calling.

"*M'sieu*, there is a gentleman asking for you. A Monsiuer Duplessis."

"Send him up," said Harper, knowing that if the caller had not been a gentleman, in appearance at least, the concierge would have said so. He knew no one of this name, but the caller might be any one from a bill collector to a policeman.

A ring at the door, and Harper, now fully attired in his "smoking," opened to a thin, well-dressed man whose mustache was waxed to sharp

points, and whose eyes were quite as sharp and black as the mustache.

"M. Harper?" inquired the visitor. "Can you give me ten minutes, if you please?"

"No, but I can give you eight minutes," said Harper cheerfully. "Come in."

Duplessis bowed and entered. He took the chair Harper indicated, sat bolt upright on its edge, and his gimlet eyes probed into Harper.

"It is about M. Hobart," he said. "I wish to explain something, knowing that you are a gentleman."

"I am not," said Harper. "Nothing of the sort. What do you want to explain?"

Duplessis looked somewhat disconcerted.

"I had a business relationship with this so unfortunate M. Hobart," he said. "He was in need of money, you comprehend. We were partners in a small enterprise. He went to Holland quite frequently—"

"What has all that to do with me?" broke in Harper.

Duplessis licked his lips, whetted the ends of his mustache. This brutal lack of sympathy seemed to pain him.

"A great deal," he rejoined stiffly. "I wish you to understand the matter, as I have every confidence in your integrity—"

"I don't know what integrity means," said Harper. "What's the point?"

"The point is," said Duplessis, irritably, "that M. Hobart was in the habit of bringing valuable packages from Amsterdam for me. He was in Holland a week ago and brought back one such package. Before he could deliver it to me, he was unexpectedly ordered back to Amsterdam at five minutes' notice. Not wishing to leave this package in his rooms, he stopped on his way to the station and deposited it with the Crédit Largier, wiring me what he had done. As you may know, he was killed this morning. You obtained the receipt for that package, which belongs to me."

"Oh!" said Harper. He dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette, thoughtfully. "My dear M. Duplessis, you overwhelm me with confusion! I had no idea such a thing was possible!"

The other smiled. "Now that you understand—"

"But I don't!" exclaimed Harper, looking very bewildered.

"What is it, then, that is not clear?"

"I don't see how Hobart could have left that package at the bank on his way to the train—and have left the receipt for it in his rooms!"

Duplessis looked fixedly at Harper. His thin features tightened perceptibly.

"So, you make a joke of it, do you?" he said slowly.

"No," said Harper. 'My dear fellow, you slipped up in your story, that's all. Of course, if you want the receipt and the property really belongs to you, then the matter is very simple. I suppose the fellow in the red neckerchief was your agent, eh? And you traced me through him."

"Exactly," assented Duplessis. "And you struck him with your fist. That is in contravention of the law, *m'sieu.* One must not use the hands in fight."

"True," said Harper solemnly. "It's a terrible habit of mine. I deplore it deeply. Why, once I hit a man in the head and broke his ankle. Well, well, if this package belongs to you, I had better give you the receipt and be done with it, eh?"

"Assuredy, *m'sieu,*" said the other hopefully.

"You can, of course, convince me that it belongs to you. Describe the contents, if you please. If that tallies with the contents of the package—"

He made a gesture, and leaned back. Duplessis spoke eagerly.

"Easily done, *m'sieu.* In the package are thirty diamonds. The largest is of seven carats, the smallest of two carats. The detailed description—"

"No matter," said Harper carelessly. "I'll turn this receipt over to the Prefecture and inform them that you claim the package."

The blood drained from the sallow features of Duplessis.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "No, *m'sieu*—you are jesting!"

"Certainly not," said Harper. "Undoubtedly M. Hobart entered these diamonds when he crossed the frontier and paid duty on them. It will be very simple to prove that you—"

Duplessis leaped to his feet.

"You do not trick me!" he cried out in sudden passion. "You are not the fool you appear to be, *m'sieu!* I want that receipt, do you understand?"

Harper rose, and threw off his negligent manner.

"You go to the devil—do you understand that, M. Duplessis? H o b a r t slipped those diamonds past the customs. They're smuggled property. So far as you're concerned—no sale! Now clear out of here and do it quick."

Duplessis shook his fist and began to sputter. Harper took him by the coat lapels and shook him violently, then whirled him around and with

a kick sent him flying toward the door. In sudden terror, Duplessis kept going, jerked the door open and with a howl of rage departed.

Harper chuckled to himself, readjusted his tie, caught up his soft black silk "smoking" hat, and switched off the lights.

When he gained the street there was no sign of Duplessis in sight, but before the door waited the sleek black Renault of Foucher. The latter grinned, saluted, and held open the car door. There was something solid and cheerfully competent about Foucher. He had been in more than one tight place with Harper, was a discreet, reckless, and entirely dependable man according to circumstances, and knew Paris like a book. Harper gave the address of the newspaper office, and in another moment was being smoothly bowled toward the city.

"Smuggled diamonds, eh?" he reflected comfortably. "That accounts for everything."

Reaching the newspaper office, Harper communed briefly with Foucher.

"I'll be here about fifteen minutes, my old one. Then we'll slip up to that restaurant in the Rue Vauquier, and while I'm having dinner you'll have a bottle of wine. After that, the opera. When the performance is over, be on hand and we'll go out to the Bois for a large evening. Suit you?"

"*Entendu, m'sieu,*" and Foucher's white teeth flashed under his mustache.

Upon gaining the city room, Harper got his story and tapped off a cable on it. He learned nothing of importance. The murderer of Hobart was unknown, had left no clew.

The diamonds he was bringing back to his employers, registered with the customs and duty paid at the frontier, were clean gone.

"The poor boob couldn't resist the temptation," thought Harper as he worked. "It was a cinch for him to smuggle in a package of sparklers. A man in his position was above suspicion, and could not afford to take any chances. So he took 'em. If I turn over that receipt to the police, it'll blacken the poor devil's name. Can't do that. I suppose it really should go to Duplessis —only I don't like that bird a little bit. Hm! Well, that problem can rest until tomorrow."

He was very speedily to learn his mistake about this.

His story finished, he slipped out the back way to

the cable office, which was just around the corner, filed it, and his work was done. When he came came back to where Foucher awaited him, he found the chauffeur striding up and down, his gray dust-coat flapping, his hands waving in the air, talking to himself furiously. He stopped short at seeing Harper.

"*M'sieu!*" he broke out. "A species of imbecile, a *salopard*, a kind of a cabbage, was here talking to me! He wanted to replace me and use the car when you came out—you comprehend? It was a trap for you. I got out the pistol from under the seat, and that misbegotten one ran in a hurry, let me tell you!"

"Took you for an ordinary taxi driver, eh?" said Harper. "Hm! Something's up, Foucher."

He thought rapidly. Duplessis had seemed to him like an ordinary petty rascal, but now he changed his mind about it. He had been followed, trailed, by experts, and they had evidently trailed him here also. This meant a gang. And Paris was full of gangs, all sorts and conditions of them. The slickest criminals in Europe, and not a few from America, congregated here.

"Foucher, let us obey a hunch," said Harper abruptly. "Dinner is important, the opera is fascinating, but hunches are imperative. Go to the Prefecture."

He got in, and Foucher followed suit, leaping away at vicious speed toward the Ile de la Cité and the ancient Prefecture of Police. Harper, who never lacked cool effrontery, ordered Foucher in past the sentries to the courtyard, and went directly to the Foreign Section. Being known here, as were most correspondents, he very shortly found himself talking with the inspector in charge of the Hobart case—a weary but polite gentleman who was anxious to get home to dinner.

"Just one thing, *mon ami*," said Harper. "I shall not detain you a moment. Have you any clew, any hint not given to the newspapers? I promise not to divulge it."

"Your word is good, *m'sieu*," was the immediate response. "We have no clew, it is true, but I have an idea that this is the work of the Vahanian crowd. They are Levantines or Syrians, and while we have nothing definite against them, some ugly rumors have come to us. Sooner or later there will be an explosion."

Harper nodded. He was well aware that the French police do not disdain hunches and have obtained extraordinary

results where no tangible clews have been given, by pushing their hunches to the limit. Levantines, eh? He started suddenly. Something in the appearance of Duplessis had made him think the man could not be French. He described Duplessis in detail, and asked if the inspector knew of such a man.

"Of course, *m'sieu*. That is Vahanian himself. You know him? He has a shop here in Rue La Fontaine, another in Cannes, another in Deauville."

"I thought he might be Vahanian," assented Harper, careful not to give himself away. Swift exultation seized upon him. "He lives here in Paris?"

"Just outside, in Boulogne —56, Boulevard Jean Jaurès."

Harper rose and thanked the inspector, arranging with him to be informed of any developments. He was tempted to make a breast of everything, but in such case the name of Hobart must inevitably be blackened beyond repair, and Harper was resolved this should not be. Leaving the offices, he rejoined Foucher, and presently they were whirling back to the little restaurant which Harper favored. They went slowly, however, at his insistence. He knew they were being shadowed.

Upon reaching the restaurant, he beckoned Foucher inside with him. The spectacle of a man in dinner attire, joined at the same table by his chauffeur, was distinctly out of the ordinary, but Harper was well known here and Paris cares little for appearances.

"And now, Foucher, said Harper, when he had ordered, "we have business on hand to-night, instead of the opera. We have been followed, you comprehend? When we leave here, however, I do not want to be followed."

Foucher grinned. "We'll not be followed far, *m'sieu*."

"We'll go first to my apartment, where I imagine I'll find that thieves have been through everything. Then to find the thieves."

"Good!" said Foucher with enthusiasm. His wine arrived, and he sampled it with evident appreciation, asking no questions.

Harper had an idea that he was on the trail of something startling. He did not know what it was, but he thrilled to the work in hand; he had the conviction that there was more to this business than he yet knew. Vahanian, eh? The man would undoubtedly have his apartment searched, hoping to find the receipt.

Leaving the table, Harper

went to the telephone and presently had his concierge on the line. No one had arrived asking for him, he learned.

"Listen, then," he said swiftly. "There is a hundred francs in it for you, my friend! In half an hour or three-quarters, I shall arrive. It is possible that before then some one will come, wanting to get into my apartment. He will undoubtedly be a good liar. Offer no hindrance, you understand? But once he gets in—keep him there until I arrive.'

"Understand, *m'sieu,*" came the response. "It is not an affair for the police?"

"Certainly not," said Harper. "Not if you want those hundred *balles,* my friend!"

He went back to the table, and attacked his meal ravenously.

Twenty minutes later they departed. Looking back, Harper saw a black Hispano, a large and powerful car, creep out into the street behind them. He shoved open the window behind Foucher.

"Hispano after us! You can't shake that off."

Fouchcher merely snorted in his mustache and headed for the boulevards. Reaching the Capucines, streaming with all the torrential early evening traffic that rushes through the pulsing heart of Paris, he bided his chance and deliberately swung out on a red traffic light. An instant later police whistles were shrilling, white batons were waving frantically, and Foucher was going away from there in a hurry. Twisting around two corners, he hurtled back into the Place de l'Opera with the traffic stream, and straightened out with a triumphant grin.

"A Renault can get away with anything—but just let that big Hispano try it!" he exclaimed exultantly. "Still, if they got my number, *m'sieu* will have have to pay a fine to-morrow."

"Cheap at the price," and Harper laughed. "Get to the apartment in a hurry, but don't show up in front. Wait on the side street till I go up."

Foucher nodded and stepped on the gas.

He made fast work of it. Ten minutes later he was pulling up in a tiny side street, with Harper's apartment just around the corner. Harper strode up to the apartment entrance, noted a couple of cars standing farther along, and turned in. He tapped at the window of the concierge, which was instantly opened.

"Thank God, *m'sieu!*" exclaimed the concierge. "It is

but two minutes since a man came, saying that you had given him your keys, that he was a friend. He showed the keys. He went on up to your apartment. Me, I have been sitting here with my revolver—"

Harper laughed, and produced a hundred francs.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Had my keys, did he? Probably he's some expert thief. If you hear any commotion up there, say nothing. I'm going out by the servants' entrance."

Two minutes later he stood before his own door. It was closed and locked. His key ready, he opened the door as swiftly as possible. The lights were on full, and a man was in the act of rising from Harper's desk. He had been caught completely by surprise.

He was a stranger, a good-looking, well-dressed man, very swarthy, with powerful shoulders and vigorous features. He stood motionless, realizing that he was trapped, then his hand crept toward his pocket.

"One moment!" exclaimed Harper amiably. "I have just seen M. Vahanian. He told me you were here. Everything is adjusted, my friend."

The intruder looked startled.

"What!" he exclaimed. "He told you—"

"That you were looking for the receipt, yes."

Harper's lack of surprise, his air of cheerful friendliness, staggered the intruder, forced him to believe Harper's words. The American closed the door, lit a cigarette, pointed to the open box on the table.

"Sit down, smoke, make yourself comfortable. No hard feelings, my friend. Vahanian wants you to telephone him at once, as soon as I turn over the receipt to you. By the way, he didn't mention your name."

"Leclerc," murmured the man, watching Harper half suspiciously, "Etienne Leclerc."

Harper grinned. "A good, honest French name, eh? You didn't carry it in Syrian quarters, I'll bet a dollar! Well, sit down and be comfortable. I want a word or two with you before I hand over the receipt. I'll have to make sure you're Vahanian's man."

The other dropped into a chair and took a cigarette from the box. Harper had sized him up at a glance as an ugly customer. The man undoubtedly carried a weapon, and would not hesitate to use it. The name of Vahanian, however, had effec-

tually disarmed him.

"If you wanted the receipt," observed Harper casually, "you've been looking in the wrong place for it." He crossed to the dresser, upon which lay the blank envelope that had inclosed the receipt; in the upper left-hand corner it bore the name of the Crédit Largier. Picking it up, Harper wet the gummed flap and sealed it. Then he returned to the desk and sat down. His movements were leisurely, unhurried, distinctly not alarming.

"Have you anything to prove that you're Vahanian's man?" he asked.

Leclerc nodded. "I have letters sent to me in care of Vahanian."

"Excellent," said Harper. His pulses leaped; this was all he wanted to know. He was sure now of his course. "Then, if—"

As he paused, Leclerc took two letters from his pocket and extended them. Harper glanced at them. True, they were addressed to Leclerc in care of Vahanian.

"Enough," said Harper, with a nod, as he returned them. With them, he handed over the envelope, and rose. Reaching out, he pulled forward the telephone on its rack. "If you'll call Vahanian and tell him everything is settled, our business will be ended."

Leclerc fingered the envelope, turned it over, saw the name of the Crédit Largier.

"I'll have to open this and make sure," he growled. "Better call him first—"

He rose and took the chair that Harper pushed out, and leaned forward over the desk. Catching up the telephone, he called a number. He did not observe that Harper caught up a heavy paper-weight of brown and yellow jade from the desk.

The blow that Harper struck was a cruel one. As it fell, Harper reached out with his left hand and caught the telephone from the relaxed fingers of Leclerc, who slumped over in the chair, head hanging.

"Allo, allo!" came a voice.

"M. Vahanian, if you please," said Harper. "A friend of M. Leclerc's is speaking."

"One moment, *m'sieu.*"

Then, shortly, Vahanian's voice came over the wire. Harper grinned to himself. He was not dealing with a Frenchman now, and this meant a good deal—a Frenchman would have smelled something wrong with his acent

at once.

"Allo, M. Vahanian!" he said "This is Emile Chaveaux, a friend of M. Leclerc. I am at the Rendezvous des Chauffeurs—the café at the corner of the Avenue de Vincennes and the Rue Gros, the *rond-point* de Grenelle—you know the place, no doubt. M. Leclerc is here and begs that you will send a car for him. He was hit by a taxicab and is hurt. He says to tell you that he has secured the thing you desire—"

"Name of a name!" ejaculated Vahanian in some agitation. "He is hurt, you say?"

"Not badly, *m'sieu,* not badly," returned Harper. "A rib or two broken, perhaps. We have taken good care of him."

"But where is his own car?" demanded Vahanian. "The Citroen, with Emile driving? But I forgot, you do not know—"

"There was another car, *m'sieu,*" said Harper quickly. "There was an accident just here at the turn of the bridge. Two men were badly hurt. Leclerc staggered in here and asked me to telephone you—he is a *brave,* that one!"

"But I have no car to send, until the Hispano comes back," cried Vahanian. "He says that he has the paper?"

"He has something yes," and Harper chuckled to himself. "He did not say what it was. Be under no worry, *m'sieu.* He is with friends. We will take care of him until a car comes, so there is no haste—"

"In ten minutes at most I will send for him," broke in Vahanian hastily. "Here in Boulogne it is hard to find a taxicab, you comprehend. Give him all that he desires, make him comfortable. I cannot come myself, but I will send without delay."

"Understood, *m'sieu,*" said Harper, and hung up.

He turned to the senseless Leclerc and swiftly frisked the man. A pistol, and no baby's toy either; a heavy sheath-knife; then a second pistol—a beautiful weapon at which Harper stared in blank astonishment. It was small, but of large caliber, and was ornately mounted in gold, with a nameplate on either side of the butt. On these name-plates were engraved three initials—S. H. H.

Harper remembered the name on the door of Hobart's apartment—S. H. Hobart. A soft whistle broke from him.

"Somebody in Vahanian's crowd murdered Hobart and robbed him!" he exclaimed. "And this pistol was taken from him. This scoundrel took it as a share of the loot, no

doubt! He hasn't had time yet to scratch out this engraving—"

He breathed on the pistol, wiped it with his handkerchief, slid it again into the pocket of Leclerc, went on with his search. His brain was in a whirl of excitement now, but he forced himself ahead methodically. A huge roll of thousand-franc notes, which he pocketed at once; jewelry, which he disregarded; no papers of any kind, except the two letters, and these were love-missives from a lady. But Harper had found enough.

Seizing a towel from his dresser, he tore it into strips and bound Leclerc hand and foot, mercilessly and efficiently. Then he sat down to the telephone and got hold of the Prefecture — this demanded headquarters, and no local commissariat. When he got the Foreign Section, he gave his name and address.

"I just came home and found a man in my apartment, evidently a sneak-thief or robber," he said. "I knocked him out and tied him up, but an object I found in his pocket makes me think he was connected with the Hobart murder of this morning. So I've called you direct. Better send a couple of men from the Sûreté straight here. If I'm not here, I'll not be gone long. This chap is connected with the Vahanian outfit, by the way."

He hung up, forestalling any protests or explanations. Leaving the lights switched on, he hastened downstairs and halted at the window of the concierge.

"Two agents will be here before long," he said. "Send them right up to my apartment; the door is unlatched. Say I'll be back soon."

He hurried out into the street. One of the two cars, waiting a little way up the block, was a Citroen. He approached it rapidly. The other car was empty, parked.

A man got out of the Citroen and stared at Harper. It was the ruffianly little rascal with the red neckerchief. Harper broke into a laugh and beckoned.

"Emile! So that's your name, is it?" he said.

"Ah, *m'sieu!* So we meet again, eh?" returned Emile impudently. Harper chuckled, and produced a handful of Leclerc's money, from which he took a thousand-franc note. He handed it to the astounded rascal, and addressed him in fluent slang.

"Here, Emile! Orders from Vahanian. The cops have pinched the Boulogne house, and everything's in a jam. Clear out with the car and

lay low for a day or two, then try a telephone call. You understand?"

"Name of a little black dog! The Boulogne house pinched?" stammered the rascal. "A thousand francs—*Mon Dieu!* I don't care who's pinched, then. Where's Leclerc?"

"Dead," said Harper coolly. 'He's the one who blew the game to the cops. You'd better clear out quick."

"Whew! Me, I don't understand all this," said Emile, and turned. "But I understand a thousand francs, *m'sieu. Adieu!*"

He climbed into the Citroen, started the engine, and was gone with a whir of gears. Harper chuckled and went on to where Foucher awaited him. He had got rid of Emile, Leclerc was due for lockup, and Vahanian was alone in the Boulogne house—or would be alone there in a few minutes.

"Boulogne, Foucher, and in a hurry," he said, as he jumped into the car. "Fifty-six Boulevard Jean Jaurès. The Porte d'Auteuil is the closest, I imagine."

The car shot away. With a cigarette to aid his reflections, Harper leaned back and did some quick thinking.

He began to see everything at last—not too distinctly, but clearly enough. Now there was no doubt that Hobart had been murdered by some of Vahanian's outfit. Probably the Syrian had learned a good deal from Hobart about his Amsterdam errands, knew that on this hurried trip he would bring back a valuable load of diamonds, and had taken the chance to kill and rob him. A million was a lot of money, even in francs.

"At that, the murder was probably accidental, or at least not planned by Vahanian," thought Harper, as the car rolled up to the Auteuil gate and Foucher went in for his return ticket, before going on to the suburbs. "When he found out about it, he sent Emile to get the receipt. That affair isn't quite cleared up, but it doesn't matter now. If Vahanian had come to me with a straight story, instead of lying about it, I might have given him the receipt. As it is, he's in Dutch and no mistake. And that spike-mustached gent will cough up everything, if the right persuasion is applied. He's no hero."

This had been the nub of his rather vague plan, which events had aided considerably. If he could get Vahanian alone, he was confident that he could make the rascal talk, for the Syrian had shown him that afternoon that he was

pure yellow.

The car rolled out the avenue past the Botanical Gardens. Harper leaned forward and addressed Foucher.

"Old man, we need help ahead. There's a chap I want to see alone, if possible, and he doesn't want to se me. He has a pretty bad gang on hand, unless I've succeeded in getting rid of them."

"There are some bad ones in Boulogne, *m'sieu,*" said Foucher sagely. "Algerians, all sorts—workers at the factories. And when those fellows use knives, they slit up the belly, always."

"Keep your gun handy, then," r e t u r n e d Harper. "When we get there, you get into the house. Say you're a taxi driver and you've brought a hurt man from the *rond-point* de Grenelle. A man named Leclerc. If a crowd is on hand inside, we're out of luck and may have to beat it fast. Otherwise I want to get into the house.

"This is a dangerous game we're on. The men are killers —they'll murder us if we let them. In fact, at the rate we're going, this affair is almost getting me dizzy, like a merry-go-round. A merry-go-round of murder, if you will, or"—he grinned at the joke—"a murder-go-round. But the faster things go, the more we have in our favor. In dealing with rascals one takes them by surprise with a speedy attack, eh, *mon ami?*"

"I c o m p r e h e n d," said Foucher. "Speed and strategy will confound the assassins. Leclerc. Hurt. From the *rond-point* de Grenelle. That part *I* will not fail on."

And Foucher deftly transferred something from the seat beside him to his coat pocket. It was clear that he understood perfectly.

They swung into the main street of Boulogne, once a very Newport of Parisian life, but now a dingy echo of past glories, with most of its former splendor inhabited by factory workers. A light, misty rain had begun to fall. Peering at the house numbers, Foucher came to a halt before an imposing structure, with a wall on either side betokening a garden. He got out, went to the gate in the wall, and rang the bell. The gate was opened. Foucher spoke for a moment, then came out to the car.

"A servant, *m'sieu*—a foreigner of some sort," he said swiftly. "He has gone to tell his master. He spoke as though no one else was here."

Harper glanced around. Shops were close by, numbers of people were passing. It

would not do to have any disturbance out here at the gate.

"Very well. When he comes back, help me in. When we pass the gate, be ready. Give me your dust-coat."

Foucher stripped off his gray dust-coat, and Harper swiftly donned it to hide his evening attire. A moment later the gate opened.

"All right, *m'sieu,*" came a voice.

Harper got out, Foucher put an arm around him, and they went to the gate. There a tall figure intervened.

"I'll take him now—put your arm around me, Leclerc—"

Harper passed his arm around the neck of the man. The gate slammed. His arm constricted. There sounded a stifled gasp, the thud of two blows. The dark figure collapsed.

"Better tie him up and lay him out of the way," said Harper softly. "Then wait here in the garden. Whistle twice, if any one comes. I'll call you if I need you."

"Understood, *m'sieu.*"

A rapid glance around showed Harper the house entrance, a dozen feet ahead—a portico illumined by an overhead light. He threw off the dust-coat. To the left appeared the outline of an old marble fountain, graveled paths, flowering shrubs. Another wall bounded this garden.

Advancing swiftly. Harper had set foot on the steps when, in the portico just above, appeared Vahanian.

"Where is he?" said the man, jeering out. "Oh—"

"Good evening, my dear Duplessis," and Harper stood before him, laughing a little at the man's utter discomfiture and quick alarm. "I took the place of your friend Leclerc, so come along and we'll have a chat. You needn't call your man. He's out of the way."

He seized Vahanian by the arm and swung him around, patting him genially on the back. The little man drew clear with a jerk, and fright was in his eyes.

"What — what does this mean?" he cried. "How did you get here—"

Harper surveyed him cheerfully.

"None of your business. I want to talk with you, about the receipt. Be a good boy and you'll not get hurt, Vahanian. So trot along and don't waste time."

He locked arms with Vahanian, got a grip on his wrist, forced him into the hallway ahead. Pausing, he closed the front door and shot the bolt. His host uttered a bleat of pure terror, then accepted his fate. Shrewd and

unscrupulous Vahanian might be, merciless and tricky, but he had no physical force whatever.

Harper marched his captive down the hall, to where an open door showed a lighted room, and turned in. This was a very handsome old library with high bookcases about the walls, and a large flat desk of mahogany and brass, a most imposing affair fully eight feet long. The two windows were closed, the steel shutters were drawn.

Closing the door, Harper locked it, then regarded his host cheerfully.

Vahanian shrank into the chair before the desk. His face, behind the spiked mustache, was a gray mask of fright.

Harper made no mistake about the man, however; terrorized he might be, but was the more potentially dangerous on that account. Pushed into a corner, he would fight with frenzied panic.

Vahanian's hand stole out as though to push shut an open drawer of the desk. Harper strode forward and checked the motion, drew the drawer farther open, and then smiled. No pistol came to light, and he perceived the truth. Like most French desks of the sort, this one was probably furnished with an abundance of locks, controlled by certain of the drawers. If these were closed, the most expert cracksman could not get into the desk.

"Never mind, my friend, I'm not here to steal from you," said Harper amusedly, and pulled up a chair. "So you want that receipt, do you? And you're ready to pay for it?"

Vahanian's eyes lit up.

"I'll pay for it, yes!" he exclamied. "How much?"

"We'll let you mention price," said Harper, getting out his cigarettes. "Smoke? No? Well, I had a long talk with your friend Leclerc. He gave up everything, after I had persuaded him a trifle. Everything, you understand? About Hobart, I mean."

A ghastly pallor leaped into Vahanian's face.

"What — w h a t d o you mean?"

Harper leaned back and puffed at his cigarette for a moment.

"Exactly what I say, my dear Vahanian. It was a most unfortunate error committed by your agent—"

"Error?" repeated the other, with a stifled gasp. "I don't understand!"

"I think you do." Harper regarded his victim with a slow smile. "If Hobart had

not resisted, had given up the diamonds without a struggle as you figured he would do—well, you would be a lot safer now!"

Anguished terror leaped from the black eyes.

"It is a lie!" he cried out hoarsely. "I didn't send Leclerc to rob him—"

Then he checked himself, and a terrible expression came into his face as he met the cool regard of Harper.

"So!" observed the latter. "Leclerc was the murderer. Now, don't get excited about it, I beg of you. I am here to talk about this receipt, you understand; nothing else matters. If you had told me the absolute truth this afternoon, if you had not lied about it, I should have given you the receipt at once. I suppose the truth is that Hobart smuggled in that packet from Amsterdam, and then had a disagreement with you about the price. For safe-keeping, he had placed it with the Crédit Largier. Eh?"

"Yes," said Vahanian nervously, trying to get a grip on himself, and somewhat reassured by Harper's lack of excitement.

"Yes. We—we had a quarrel about it. He demanded too much. The diamonds belong to me, and he asked too much for bringing them over. We had agreed on a percentage and he wanted to double it."

"I see," said Harper. "You quarreled And that was why you sent Leclerc to rob him on the way back from this trip. You wanted to get him in your power, blackmail him, make him a slave. It's frequently done."

Vahanian looked at him in sullen silence, uneasy and astonished.

"I—I will give you five thousand francs," he said hesitantly.

"Give it me," said Harper with a nod.

Vahanian pulled open one drawer on the right of his desk. This movement unlocked a drawer on the left, which he drew open. He slid out a little sheaf of bank notes and began to count them off.

Harper looked at him, studied him. Here was a scoundrel whom the police had been unable to catch; a man shrewd, slippery, a blackmailer, well served by men around him. Yet, stripped of these men, his defenses pierced, Vahanian had gone to pieces at a word. He had no moral strength, nothing in himself except a usually keen and agile brain, and when this was shaken he crumpled up.

"Here are your five thousand francs," he said, turning

and holding out the money. Harper took it and pocketed it with a nod.

"Very well. That will cover my expenses quite nicely. Now for the receipt." Harper took off his wrist watch and pried at the back of it with his thumb-nail. "You know, Vahanian, I am resolved to keep the name of poor Hobart clear. Why? You'd not understand. I never even met him. However, the man is dead, and perhaps I have a sympathy for dead men. At all events, just one thing would prove he had betrayed his trust—this receipt."

From the watch, he took the folded paper, replaced the back of the watch, slipped it again on his wrist. Vahanian started at sight of the paper, watched it with eager, shining eyes, as Harper unfolded it.

"Give it to me!" he exclaimed stretching forth his hand.

"Not so fast," said Harper. "I didn't agree to give it to you, did I? You offered me five thousand francs, and I took them. It was very kind of you. But now I must protect the name of Hobart, whom your agent murdered so brutally."

"Are you mad?" cried Vahanian. "What are you talking about?"

Harper smiled, scratched a match, and held it to the receipt.

A scream burst from Vahanian. He flung himself forward, clawing at the paper, which took fire and spurted up in flame. Harper thrust out a hand and hurled him aside, and let the blazing paper dart and eddy down to the floor.

"You American devil!" cried Vahanian, looking up with a distorted face. "You—you have destroyed a fortune—now I cannot get those diamonds—"

"You'll have a deuce of a time doing it, at least," said Harper.

A shrill cry of rage burst from Vahanian. He leaped to his feet. The veins stood out on his forehead with an access of passion; his sallow features became suffused with blood. Inarticulate, incoherent, screaming with fury, he hurled himself on Harper, clawing, striking, absolutely blind with torrential emotion, as entirely out of control as an hysterical woman.

And, such was the frenzied vehemence of the man, Harper was borne backward and all but brought to the floor, long fingers locking in his throat as though to rip out his windpipe. Then he struck, again and again, as one

strikes at an attacking reptile.

Vahanian, b r u i s e d and bleeding, was knocked back into a corner and crumpled up there, senseless.

No sounds penetrated to this room from outside, for the door was thick and solid. In the wild flurry with Vahanian, Harper did not hear the shrill whistles from the garden that were desperately repeated and then fell silent. Nor did he hear the voices outside.

He went to the desk and drew open d r a w e r after drawer. Somewhere here, he was convinced, would be the loot taken from the murdered Hobart. And he was right. From one of the drawers he took a small flat leather case, stamped with Hobart's name in gold. He put this on the desk and was in the act of opening it when a sharp knock sounded at the door.

Harper whirled, darted to the wall, switched off the lights, and broke the switch knob.

"M. Vahanian!" came a voice. "Are you there? Who bolted the front door?"

Harper k n e w h e was caught. He had discovered no weapon in the desk; he was unarmed, and the Hispano had come back from its futile errand. He took hold of the key in the lock and turned it, softly, then stepped to one side. The door was now unlocked.

"The devil!" came a growling voice from the corridor. "Strange that no one is about! Vahanian!"

"Open the door, fool!" sounded another voice. "The place can't be deserted!"

A hand tried the door swung it open so that it came back against Harper's figure, letting in a swath of light from the hall. Looking through the crack, he saw a number of men there. One of them stepped in and came to the electric switch.

"Devil take it!" he exclaimed angrily. "The switch is broken—the knob is off! Here, Ivan, your flash light! Something queer about this."

There was a surge forward of figures. Four or five men in all, thought Harper. He was lost, once the body of Vahanian was discovered and lights brought into the room; his one chance now was to catch them off guard, break through, get out of the place. He had learned all he wanted to know.

The beam of a flash light reached out across the room. Harper slid around the door and catching the nearest figure, sent it crashing into the

others. The way was clear. Oaths, startled exclamations, arose behind him as he slipped out into the hallway.

Then he halted abruptly, incredulous, dumfounded. Into the portico, beyond the open front door, came a man, who jerked up a pistol and covered him instantly, wild eyes glaring at him with murderous hatred.

It was Leclerc — Leclerc, whom he had left bound hand and foot!

From the eyes of this man who had murdered Hobart only that morning Harper saw death glaring at him.

Behind him, men stumbled out into the hall, uttered cries of amazement at sight of Leclerc. They could see only the back of Harper, were bewildered by the presence of a stranger. Leclerc's face was white, desperate, with a heavy bruise over one eye where Harper had struck him. He opened his mouth to cry out something.

"Imbecile!" snapped Harper. "Vahanian wants to see you instantly!"

As he spoke, he strode toward Leclerc. Then, as he met the deadly gaze of the man, he saw that guile was useless; those flaming eyes were in the very act of murder, the finger was contracting on the trigger—no escape!

Harper d r o p p e d in his stride, went headfirst in a low tackle. The pistol exploded, almost in his face. As he struck against Leclerc, arm sweeping out, he felt a sharp, hot stab of pain, heard a frightful cry as the bullet plunged into the group of men behind him. Then he was thrashing on the cement floor of the portico, lost in a wild and frantic grapple.

Then, suddenly, came a rush of feet. Harper felt men tearing him away. He got in one last crack that stretched Leclerc quivering and helpless. About him were agents of police.

"Good evening, M. Harper," said his friend, the sub-prefect from headquarters, as he was released. "We owe you great thanks for that telephone summons. Unhappily, this man Leclerc broke away from us as we arrested him. We followed him here—"

"Good!" exclaimed Harper. "Then get into the study yonder and get Vahanian. You'll find the diamonds there that were taken from Hobart. This Leclerc was the murderer. Where's Foucher?"

"Here, *m'sieu!*" The figure of Foucher pushed forward. "It was magnificent, *m'sieu!*"

"Rats," said Harper. "If we—ouch!"

"The s h o t!" exclaimed

Foucher anxiously. "*M'sieu* is hurt?"

Harper was hurt. He was suddenly conscious of the fact. As he plunged forward in that sharp dive to get Leclerc, the bullet had reached him after all—even though it had gone on to reach another of the men in the group behind him, with more deadly effect. He could feel blood running down his leg.

He investigated swiftly, found the police agents grinning at him, then swung around and wiped the scarlet smear from his hands.

"Nothing but a scratch!" he exclaimed. "Come along, Foucher. G e n t l e m e n , you know where to find me—"

Outside he paused at the curb, while Foucher held open the door of the cab for him. Then he winced, and shook his head.

"I think I'll walk home, Foucher," he said, and produced some bank notes. "Here. Your share of the loot, such as it was—"

"But, *m'sieu*, your wound!" exclaimed Foucher in a sharp protest. "*M'sieu* cannot walk so far!"

"Wrong," said Harper, "I couldn't ride so far, though. I can't sit down at all—I'll take my meals standing for a while."

And Foucher looked after him with a broad grin of comprehension as he strode away and melted into the night.

MURDER *IS* A SERIOUS MATTER!

"Murder is a very serious matter," said Val Gielgud, Sir John Gielgud's brother, at a panel meeting of British detective story writers last year.

"I don't agree at all," said Michael Gilbert. "I don't think murder is serious." Mr. Gilbert, an attorney, writes the straight puzzle-type detective story.

"Murder is the one crime we're *all* capable of committing," insisted Christianna Brand. "It's an amateur crime."

And John Creasey pointed out, "It's misleading to say there aren't many murders. There are a great many."

Julian Symons appears to have summed up the discussion with a plea for more serious consideration of the mystery novel as literature.

a village borgia

by August Derleth

AT TWENTY-THREE, Miss Ella Maly was known as "a dear, bright girl,", very easy to look at. "Everyone" in Richland Center, Wisconsin "loved" her. She was pleasant, soft-spoken, not exactly vivacious, but not dull, either, given to good Christian practices, the Chautauqua, under the aegis of which she confided to her diary that she studied "Pindar and Simonides, the lyric poets," and "Theocritus and the two poets, Bion and Moschus, who are associated with Theocritus in a kind of parasitic renown," and to her daily labours as a bookkeeper for H. T. Bailey, a dry-goods merchant, who paid her forty dollars a month for work, which, he said, "was not very laborious."

Plainly, Ella was one of those young ladies who reflect credit upon their home towns, and even a town like Richland Center could not have had too many of them back in 1891. Unfortunately, Ella Maly was not long for this world. She

Possibly because as a people we tend to instinctively—including in politics—reject or doubt anything which defies facile categorization, many only think of August Derleth as the author of the Solar Pons pastiches, often first published in this magazine, or of his and H. P. Lovecraft's work in still another field. Author of more than a hundred published books, Derleth is of course also a widely recognized authority on regionalism in American literature including, as SMM readers know, regionalism in murder. . . . *H.S.S.*

was, in fact, not longer than twenty - three years, three months and twenty - three days.

Her last day was January 8, 1891. She came to work that day, as usual, "well and lively," her employer testified. Her day was not in any way extraordinary, except that in the evening she and her sister, Lillie, attended a birthday party for Mae Hyndman, given by another young lady of the community, Rose Zoldoske, at the home of Dr. G. R. Mitchell, where Rose lived, though she worked about town in one millinery establishment after another. There was nothing about the party to suggest that it was anything more than one of those happy, time - passing gatherings at which nothing is accomplished but a good deal of small talk, lunch is served, and perhaps a game of cards or two is played, except that in the course of the party, shortly after lunch had been served, the hostess complained of not feeling well and went up to her room to lie down a bit. She talked with Mae Hyndman, who went up to inquire after her, and sent for Ella Maly.

Thereafter Ella obligingly came down and helped with the dishes, after which she took off for home with her sister Lillie. On the way she produced some chocolate creams which she said Rose had given her; she offered some to Lillie; Lillie ate one or two and was not further tempted, which was a mercy for Lillie. Ella, however, observed that her chocolate had a bitter taste, but nevertheless resolutely devoured it, apparently impelled to do so by strong teachings about not wasting anything.

They had not gone very much further before Ella complained of feeling very ill. "I feel so queer," she said to her sister. "What can it be?" By the time they reached the gate to the Maly home, Ella fell down; she could go no further. She began to cry and wondered anew what it could be. Lillie, now very much alarmed, called her mother and ran for Dr. Mitchell. The doctor subsequently testified that his first thought, when he looked at Ella, was that "she had been poisoned." He wanted to give her an emetic, but was unable to do so, for she could not swallow. He evidently did not know quite what to do, and the desperate family of the ailing girl summoned another physician, Dr. Haskell.

Dr. Haskell had less trouble than Dr. Mitchell in making a diagnosis. He was forthright

about it; Ella, he said, was dying of strychnine poisoning. He was familiar enough with the symptoms to depose later in the month that Ella "died of strychnine poisoning and could not have died of any other trouble, considering the symptoms." In the course of his testimony, the doctor testified that Ella had spoken to him during her travail and had asked him, rather oddly, if the convulsions she was enduring were not "similar to those Mrs. Mitchell died of."

Ella Maly died early in the morning of the following day. Dr. Haskell's opinion, which was reluctantly seconded by Dr. Mitchell, made an autopsy mandatory, and, accordingly, Ella was bereft of her stomach, which was dispatched to Rush Medical College in Chicago. There ensued a period of tense waiting, in the course of which some curious circumstances came to light.

If Ella Maly had died of eating poisoned chocolates, she could have received them only from Rose Zoldoske. This was perplexing for Rose Zoldoske had no apparent motive for desiring the death of a friend. Rose, too, was an amiable girl, if somewhat high-strung. She had come into Wisconsin from Missouri, though she had relatives in near-by Iowa, and worked in Richland Center as a milliner, taking quarters in the Mitchell home, where, in the previous spring, Mrs. Mitchell had shuffled off this mortal coil, of "convulsions." Rose was dark, a nervous type, and, like Ella, very easy to look at. She did not appear to be quite so given to Christian work or the Chautauqua, and if she had any inclination to the Greek poets she gave no hint of it. Nevertheless, she would appear to have been a girl of simple and direct inclinations, and she had an undeniable tendency to drive straight to the heart of any point. She was, in short, a young woman, of a type more common in our own day, who knew what she wanted.

Ella Maly's dying inquiry set tongues to wagging. Miss Anna Kisling, who had been employed as a servant in the Mitchell household during the spring of 1890, set forth she could say nothing about the Maly case, but added significantly, "I can testify if Mrs. Mitchell's death is inquired into." In no time at all, relatives of the dead woman who had been Dr. Mitchell's wife, were demanding an exhumation and examination of the remains of Mrs. Mitchell.

Furthermore, some curious comments by Rose Zoldoske were coming to light. She had

paid a visit to the home of Dr. Moses Lovering for some medicine one day in the autumn just past. "I want you to speak a good word for me to Dr. Mitchell," she told Dr. Lovering, and added cryptically, "He ought to marry me." She had thought this service worth ten dollars and offered that sum to Dr. Lovering; he had refused it.

Not long afterward, Dr. Lovering had received five dollars anonymously. He took it unerringly to Rose and gave it back to her. She said again on this occasion that Dr. Mitchell "ought" to marry her. "I told her," testified Dr. Lovering at the trial, "that the doctor always praised her." She replied that the doctor was "different to her." She nowhere amplifiied this perplexing statement, so that Dr. Lovering was left in some doubt as to how Dr. Mitchell had been to her that he should now be "different." He spoke somewhat cautiously to his colleague about Rose on a subsequent occasion and reported that Dr. Mitchell had said "there was nothing between himself and Rose. He objected to Rose because of her bad temper."

Mrs. Anna McClaren, who had joined the Mitchell household as a housekeeper in July 1890, after Mrs. Mitchell's departure from this mundane world, recalled that Rose "always spoke well of Ella Maly." She never heard Rose say anything about marrying the doctor, but admitted that "she used to show her authority about the house."

Mrs. Hyndman, the birthday girl's mother, recalled that Rose had come to her "the last of October, I think. Rose was nervous and excited; she did not knock at the door. She asked me to recommend her to the doctor. Rose said the doctor was not acting 'as usual.' I did not think the doctor needed a wife very badly." After Ella Maly's death, Rose came to visit Mrs. Hyndman again and said, somewhat strangely, that if Mrs. Mitchell's body were exhumed, "it will go hard with the doctor."

Mae Hyndman and Lillie Maly were recalling Rose's extraordinary conversation at the party which had preceded Ella's death. Rose had talked about "the strangeness of so many people in a healthy condition being taken with convulsions." This was certainly a curious subject, particularly for one who was even at the moment seemingly indisposed and lying down in her room, having deserted the party below to entertain the visitors in her room, one by one. This

post-homicide portrait of Rose Zoldoske made her seem somewhat less than straightforward, and the citizens of Richland Center were beginning to ask some searching questions when at last, on Saturday morning, January 17, a cipher dispatch from Professor Haines of Rush Medical College was received by District Attorney Burnham, reporting that Ella Maly had unquestionably died of strychnine poisoning.

Forthwith, the dead girl's brother Anthony made a formal charge against Rose Zoldoske. The warrant for her arrest was issued by Justice Wulfing and served by Marshal Chandler. Rose cried a little when she heard the charge against her, but at once engaged the services of Black & Black, local attorneys, whom she abandoned soon after for those of Levi H. Bancroft. The editor of the Richmond Center *Republican Observer* found her "apparently very composed, eating heartily and sleeping well."

The editor saw the matter with singular clarity. "The accused girl wanted to marry Dr. G. R. Mitchell, whose wife died similarly to Miss Maly on the 25th of March last, and she thought he was in love with, and wanted to marry Miss Maly, although Dr. Mitchell was not a frequent visitor at the Maly residence, as reported by some of the daily papers, and no other motive than that of jealousy can be imagined for the alleged crime."

As for Dr. G. R. Mitchell—he was painfully surprised by all this todo in which he had a somewhat less than enviable rôle. Curiously, the papers of the day rather spared him. Yet he was either an astonishingly obtuse individual or a singularly devious man. If Rose Zoldoske had conceived so violent a passion for him that she did not hesitate to clear her path by eliminating the doctor's wife, and thereafter the young woman for whom he had some regard, she must have had more than her own dream of the fulfilment of her desires to drive her to so desperate a course.

She had evidently not consulted the doctor professionally; so she could not have been enthralled by his bedside manner. She had told a professional colleague that the doctor "ought" to marry her, but that he was now "different" to her. One is left with some questions to ask Dr. Mitchell. How had he been to Rose Zoldoske? Rose was clearly not the passive kind; if she had become enamoured

of Dr. Mitchell, she would have lost no time conveying that fact to him. How had he taken it? For all the information that saw print, he might have retired to his office for a game of mumbletypeg while he considered the problem Rose had propounded. Far more likely, however, he did nothing of the kind. Rose was easy to look at, she was available, and he was in a profession which knows that one lives but once. Or was it all in her head?

Certainly, at the very least, it was highly inconsiderate of him to look with more favour on Ella Maly than on Rose Zoldoske. Or perhaps he was just a man who had a natural aversion to being chased; perhaps he suffered under that delusion so common to the American male that he is the hunter instead of the hunted. His independence in affairs of the heart was complicated by some strange lapses, not the least of which was his bland acceptance of his wife's death "of convulsions." Small wonder that he could not quite make up his mind about the cause of Ella Maly's death until Dr. Haskell made his diagnosis positive. Quite possibly, at this contretemps, he recalled his wife's unpleasantly painful convulsions and had a faint glimmering of the resourcefulness of Rose Zoldoske.

The inquest took place on January 26. Though Dr. Mitchell testified that the strychnine he used in his practice was clearly labelled and though Drs. Mitchell, Haskell, Ludwig, De Lap and Morrow agreed that Ella Maly had died of strychnine poisoning, the jury brought in a verdict that "the said Ella Maly came to her death on the morning of January 9, 1891, from poison by strychnine, administered with murderous intent, at some time during the evening of January 8, 1891, by or at the hands of some person or persons *unknown to this jury.*"

The examination followed the inquest by but one day. Rose made her appearance in the company of her attorney, Levi Bancroft. She had "a worried, frightened look, however, changed to one of confidence before the adjournment at noon." One is hard put to it to discover any reason for confidence in the proceedings. The testimony was devoid of by-paths. Once the cause of death was established beyond question, and quite definitely b e y o n d defence counsel's absurd contention that poor Ella had been given the *coup de grâce* by Bright's

disease, a succession of witnesses hemmed Rose Zoldoske in.

Mrs. Anna McClaren testified that Rose had spent some time getting ready for the party. After she had retired to her room, she had asked Mrs. McClaren to send Mae Hyndman up to her. When she was in Rose's room, Mrs. McClaren had observed a sack with "about five cents worth of candy in it" on her dresser. Whether Rose offered Mae some of the candy is not on record; the doctor had been suspected of being fond of Mae, too. Evidently Rose decided that Ella was the preferred girl, and sent Mae down with instructions to send Ella up. But Rose admitted to Mrs. McClaren that she "had given Ella and Lillie some candy." Once the girls had gone home, Rose manifested no further signs of illness, though she was ill at ease until the doctor returned from the call to attend Ella. "When the doctor returned, Rose knew, from the expression of his face, that Ella was very sick, and she refused to play dominoes any more. She did not go to her room that night and did not undress herself, but was up and down repeatedly." Next morning, Mrs. McClaren had talked with Rose about poisoning. "Rose said there might have been something in the dishes; she said Ella might have taken it herself."

D. L. Constantine, a local merchant, testified to having sold her some chocolate creams on January 8. Into some of these creams went enough strychnine to liquidate the entire party at Dr. Mitchell's home. Quite possibly Rose, who was nothing if not thorough, had fully intended to take care of at least three of her guests; Ella and Lillie were clearly designated, however; it was just Lillie's luck that she did not happen to hit upon one of the poisoned chocolate.

When at last defence counsel took the floor, he appealed eloquently for the discharge of his client, on the basis of lack of evidence. He was not called upon to explain what he considered evidence. Justice Wulfind, however, dismissed the appeal and bound Rose over for trial at the next terms of circuit court. There, Levi Bancroft, pointing out correctly that feeling against Rose was running so high in Richland Center that he doubted she could have a fair trial, succeeded in having the trial transferred to nearby Grant County, at a special term of that court in Lancaster before Judge Cle-

mentson. It was widely known that "the defendant was determined the case should not be tried in Richland Center."

It was June when at last the trial began. Rose was no longer in hostile Richland Center, and did her best to make a good impression at Lancaster. "She was attired in a black silk dress, wore silk mittens, and carried a rose geranium blossom which she toyed with when nothing else occupied her attention." She was "composure personified," though she was observed to "twitch about the face and body" when one of the prospective jurors was excused because his mother was dying. She bore herself quite as if she had not heard that the exhumation and examination of the body of the late Mrs. G. R. Mitchell had disclosed that she, too, had died of strychnine poisoning.

As the trial wore on, however, it was evident that Rose was having trouble controlling a twitching about her face; she grew a little paler, too, but it was possible that her counsel had decided it would be best for her to look less poised and self-assured. She developed the habit of "looking the witnesses squarely in the face at all times without once removing her gaze," which, considering what had happened to Mrs. Mitchell and Ella Maly, must have been somewhat disconcerting. Rose was not well disposed towards District Attorney Burnham's charge that her venture into crime was "an awkward, bungling, clumsy piece of work from the beginning"; after all, she had managed very well with Mrs. Mitchell, and she might very well have got by with Ella Maly, too, if Dr. Mitchell had only been as convinced that Ella had simple "convulsions" as he was when his wife took her departure from life.

One could hardly gainsay the District Attorney's charge. "Although crafty and scheming in the plans she employed to accomplish her end, in every step she bungled so as to give it all away. She had even taken pains to say that if Ella was poisoned, it was by her own cake," Rose having had the cunning forethought to request all the girls at the party to bake a cake and bring it along. Nay, she had not been satisfied to suggest the home-made cake as the source of Ella's mortal seizure; perhaps, she had suggested, it "was in the dishes." To make doubly sure that the party might be prepared for Ella's death, she had talked, too, about the strangeness of so many peo-

ple dying suddenly of "convulsions." She could hardly have done worse by putting up visible signs pointing to her.

Counsel Bancroft, however, maintained gravely that all this was just "circumstantial evidence," which, as everybody knew, was not to be trusted. He did his best to prove his point that Ella had died of Bright's disease, even without any medical evidence. He prodded Henry Bailey about the desk at which Ella had had to work standing. How high was it? Was it not uncomfortable? Henry answered hotly, 'I'll give you a hundred dollars if that ain't as handy a desk as you can find in the state!"

Sadly, for his efforts, Rose had left a trail which even a rural Hawkshaw could have followed with blinders on. She had gone so far as to write a letter to Mae Hyndman, asking her to say nothing of Rose's having sent for Ella to come to her room on that lethal night, and offering to pay her for that service. Rose was evidently under the impresion, so common in America, that money will buy anything; it did not buy Mae because, truth to tell, Mae herself had been looked at with favour by Dr. Mitchell, and she had no intention of becoming Rose's third victim; indeed, she had an uncomfortable conviction that it was only by chance that she had not been in Ella Maly's place that night. Again, before anyone had mentioned that Ella had been poisoned, Rose had been indiscreet enough to say. "The poison couldn't have been in the cake, because I ate two pieces of it myself." With perfect confidence, too.

The prosecution missed a good bet, however. Rose's relations, as well as those of the deceased, to Dr. Mitchell, were only "touched upon," a consideration for the medical profession which has fortunately not been the rule in criminal cases since Dr. Crippen.

Rose bore herself affectingly while her counsel opened. The tears trickled d o w n her cheeks, she hid her face in her handkerchief. "This poor girl," said Levi Bancroft, warming to his subject, "has had no advantages save those of a farm girl, and, coming to town without any of the characteristics that opened up to her the door of society, has for five years withstood the temptations that many girls of better advantages in Richland Center have given in to." She had clearly not so stoutly withstood other temptations which, luckily for the

mortality rate in Richland Center, many girls of better advantages in that village had *not* given in to.

Taking it for granted that none of the jurors or the packed audience which crowded the courtroom had ever heard of Lucrezia Borgia, Mme. de Brinvilliers or others of their ilk, defence counsel stated boldly that "it has never occurred in all the history of murder that a woman has had the fortitude to do what Rose Zoldoske is alleged to have done," making a great point of the fact that Rose had actually joined the wake over Ella on one night. Bancroft even went so far as to assert that the strychnine had got into Ella's stomach somehow on the way from Richland Center to Rush Medical College, which was a new high in legal confidence in the gullibility of *homo sapiens*.

The trial brought out the fact that Rose was unduly concerned about the chocolates Ella had eaten. "If poison is found in Ella Maly's stomach," she asked Mrs. Anna McClaren, "could they tell what food it was in?" By a remarkable coincidence, her next question in that memorable conversation with the doctor's housekeeper so soon after Ella's painful passing had reference to the afterlife. Did Mrs. McClaren think that there was any chance for murderers to be saved? "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him," she was told; this bothered her a little, but she went right on to ask about conviction on a murder charge. It would mean imprisonment for life, declared the housekeeper. "Yes," replied Rose, "but a murderer can get pardoned after a couple of years."

Counsel Bancroft's assertion that Rose lacked the advantages sufficient to know about strychnine were rudely blasted by eleven-year-old Freddy Mitchell, the doctor's son. He had seen his father prepare strychnine for rats in Rose's presence. Freddy plainly disliked Rose. He admitted that he had written his father, during the doctor's absence, that he would kill any stepmother his father brought home; he explained that he had done so in order to "frighten Rose," because Rose wrote silly letters to him and was always talking about marrying his father. When defence counsel sought to exploit this, Freddy frankly admitted that he had got the idea of killing a stepmother from Rose, because Rose had once said that if a stepmother ever came between her and

the doctor, she would shoot or poison her.

The evidence against Rose, for all her counsel's efforts, was overwhelming. The testimony of Professors Haines and Daniels regarding strychnine found in the viscera of Ella Maly and Mrs. Mitchell was d a m n i n g. Professor Haines testified that he had obtained "one-twelfth of a grain of strychnine" from the stomach of Mrs. Mitchell, and had found traces in the liver —this from a body buried ten months; he added that it was a well-known fact that strychnine decomposed very soon in a deceased body, and plainly inferred that Mrs. Mitchell had been given a massive dose. Defence counsel still challenged the scientific evidence, but conceded it when the prosecution proposed to introduce some frogs into court, and feed them some of the greyish substance taken from Ella Maly's body and identified as strychnine. Counsel Bancroft was evidently of the opinion that the demonstration would be too damaging to his client.

"God knows I am innocent!" Rose Zoldoske had cried out immediately after the funeral, conscious of the suspicion of her townspeople. Wisely, however, Rose herself would not take the stand in her defence, and her appeal fell on deaf ears. Perhaps Rose was taking too much for granted. The jury was not inclined to take Rose's word for what the Deity knew; after deliberating twenty-two hours, they found her guilty of murder in the first degree, and she was duly sentenced to life imprisonment at Waupun.

The citizens at Lancaster, however, were incensed by the verdict. The popular feeling was that Rose was a pretty girl, and of course, a pretty girl could never commit murder. Besides, the evidence was all circumstantial evidence. There was a demonstration against the jury, and some of the press took up with the public, though not the Lancaster *Teller*, which stoutly defended the verdict. The Milwaukee *Evening Wisconsin* waxed particularly wroth over the belitting of circumstantial evidence, pointing out that circumstances, though capable of being misinterpreted, never lied. The paper had its say about the people of Lancaster and their fury over the verdict.

"The sentimental cranks, particularly of the female gender, who seem to be ruling the village of Lancaster, are doing their utmost to render poisoning, the most hellish of crimes, a light offence. . . .

They seem to have fallen into a state of imbecility over the result of the Zoldoske trial. While they are lavishing attentions on a convicted murderess, somebody ought to suggest that perhaps the family of Ella Maly, the poisoned girl, are not altogether undeserving of sympathy."

But 'twas ever thus! The dead have no appeal for addled sentimentalists. "Sentimental and chivalrous people will feel grieved," as the Madison *Democrat* put it, "if this young woman must finally be immured for life from a world so bright, so beautiful, and so full of fascination." And so full of temptation, too, the *Democrat* might have added.

The sentimentalists did not have to grieve long. Rose Zoldoske was longer for this world than either Mrs. Mitchell or Ella Maly. Sentimental Governor Scofield allowed her to languish in prison for only eight years; he pardoned her in 1899 and she dropped out of sight. Perhaps she found another Dr. Mitchell, unencumbered with a wife, or with strychnine as easy of access and himself so prone to diagnose "convulsions."

POLICE MANUFACTURE BULLETS

Hoboken's police pistol team last year made history with fifteen trophies to the credit of the newly organized team, after competitions with other police pistol teams as far away as Washington, D.C. This was despite their lack of a practise range and city budget economies which had made it necessary for the members of the team to pool their resources and invest in bullet-making machines. Budget limitations and the cost of bullets at local stores made this move necessary.

Every Wednesday night the nine members of the team gathered in the basement of one member's home. At the end of two hours, the men would have seven to eight hundred bullets ready at a cost of about one cent apiece. The ammunition would then be transferred to police headquarters.

One local store charged $1.75 for a box of fifty bullets, classified as reloads for target practise. Factory-loaded bullets, fifty in a box, cost $4.80. Sergeant Martin Wladich, who supervised the bullet making operation with Sergeant Anthony Rinaldi, insisted that the one part tin to eighteen parts lead home-made bullets were just as accurate as factory loaded bullets.

It must however be pointed out that behind the making of each bullet was this reality. They'd had to invest $1,200. in bullet-making machines. A small turret machine had cost them another $300. They were buying lead in five hundred pound lots at 15 cents per pound, and tin at about $1.10 a pound. And then they'd *still* need gun powder and primers. . . .

The saint CROSSWORD

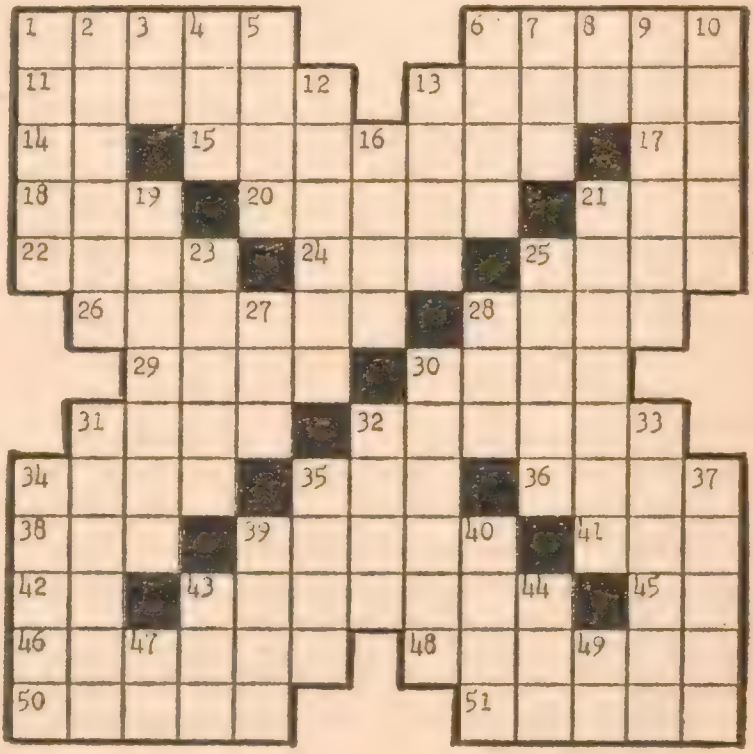
ACROSS

1. Barrel stoppers
6. — clothes man
11. Treat with oil
13. A distillate
14. Half an island
15. Averted
17. The center of a pill
18. A squealer: slang
20. Attribute of a Saint
21. Excessive
22. Feature of watch
24. Supposed to be easy
25. Sunday song
26. Slain by knight
28. Last call
29. Short qualifier
30. Opposed
31. Craves
32. To make clear
34. Sharp
35. Indefinite relative
36. Pace
38. Property of a thing
39. Considers
41. Bishop's territory
42. Goes in French
43. Pacifying
45. Degree
46. Decorated like mosaic
48. Wheedles
50. Looks lecherous
51. Brand new spouse

DOWN

1. Father of TV
2. Hidden
3. Denial
4. Pig tail forward
5. Sometimes soft
6. Victim
7. Goes with a lass
8. End of a man
9. Individual's style
10. Fisherman's line
16. Stem or check
19. Often shot at
21. Key tappers
23. Where a crook may be at
25. Anything but loves
27. Serves cooks
28. Pre-atomic banger
30. New subs
31. A kind of 27 D.
32. Discreet sound
33. Swarmed
34. Polite
35. A hot joint
37. A kind of pudding
39. Base for orators
40. Thinks he's best
43. Ford's foundation
44. Rough fish
47. The other half of 14 A
49. A Roman cricket team

Solution on page 154



what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

AS ANTHONY BOUCHER pointed out some time back, "John Dickson Carr did not actually invent the detective-story - in-a-period - setting". But he *is* inescapably identified fith this hyphenated genre, fully as much as the late Sax Rohmer is identified with the Fu Manchu saga and Baynard Kendrick with his novels about Duncan Maclain. This is not only due to his "genuine understanding of and relish for the past" (to again quote Mr. Boucher), but perhaps more to his being able to set himself into the minds of the men and women about whom he writes, and not only to write about them but to appear to live as they would have lived, think as they would have thought, act as they would have acted. This I personally feel demands more than the not uncommon "understanding of and relish for the past" of which Tony spoke. It rather demands an ability to live in that same past, to think it—to breathe it—to dream it—to come close

Another report on recent novels in which SMM readers may be interested. The writer, editor of this magazine since 1956 and editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club during 1945-52, was awarded the Critic's Edgar, the first since '60, at the 1964 Mystery Writers of America Awards ***Dinner.***

to being as one with it. . . .

Very few writers in our time, preoccupied as we are with more contemporary approaches to what we understand to be the eternal verities, have had the patience and the genius and the understanding of the past—of our past—to do what John Dickson Carr has succeeded in doing in these novels. For these are not papiér maché characters, posturing before a cursorily researched background. These are men and women, very much alive and very much in love with life, and for a brief while you have the uncomfortable feeling that a window has been opened onto another Time, and that you are witness—not necessarily to History in the making, but to the footnotes to that same history, those footnotes which we so often tend to pass by. . . . We have a tendency to forget, after all, that it is these footnotes which so often explain the contradictions of that History. . . .

That complex and contradictory personality that was Charles the Second comes to life in John Dickson Carr's superb MOST SECRET (Harper & Row, $3.95), the story of Roderick Kinsmere's adventures at his Court and in his service. Do read this. I suspect it may reawaken your interest in our past—for what happened in those days *is* part of our past after all, part of our memories as a people and part of our traditions. The negotiations between Charles of England and Louis of France were to influence the future that came to be ours.

Erle Stanley Gardner's newest Perry Mason novel, THE CASE OF THE HORRIFIED HEIRS (Morrow, $3.50), is in the cheerful and familiar tradition. Perry Mason, inevitably so, unscrambles the tangled affairs of Lauretta Trent and Virginia Baxter with his customary deftness, briging to each a peace and an absence of fear they had both been denied for some time.

MURDER CAN'T WAIT, the new Captain Heimrich mystery by Richard Lockridge (Lippincott, $3.50) has all the warmth and qualities associated with the earlier Heimrich novels. Few writers in this field have had this ability that Frances and Richard Lockridge showed, throughout their long collaboration, to write about people who at no time seem contrived but instead could almost be part of your family, or men or women about

whom you'd heard or whom you'd yourself seen very, very recently.

We each live in our individual vacuums. We are born, and we live and we eventually die without ever knowing very much about our neighbors, and even less about those people who live outside our ken. This at times frightening lack of contact between the members of the American family is something which has concerned me over the years. In my considered opinion this is a weakness, a national weakness, which no appeal to the mythology of our times can possibly excuse. The fact must be faced however that this lack of contact, this lack of awareness, is not only in the more publicised instances. It is close to being a part of our way of life, within our individual communities. This is beautifully shown in Homicide Lieutenant Nathan Shapiro's reactions as he finds himself in Westchester County where nature, in contrast to nature in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, emphatically does not know its place—but where people still do c o m m i t murder. Strongly recomended.

Victor Canning's THE SCORPIO LETTERS (Sloane, $3.95), has many of those qualities which have come to be expected in the Fleming era. George Constantine and Nicola Meade aren't exactly credible, but this is not too important.

For some time now it has been dawning on some of us that bankers are actually people. Our modern caste-lines have after all been crossed, both ways, both in the course of politics and under the levelling influence of other factors in today's society and, as a result, there is more awareness —though perhaps not understanding—of this reality of today's society. And so, instead of a Peter Wimsey or for that matter a Philo Vance, we have a man such as John Putnam Thatcher, senior vice president of Sloan Guaranty Trust and director of their Trust Department — and a catalyst for crime. . . .

Mr. Thatcher, elegant and silver-haired, described as having a "resilient vigor that is far removed from the frozen dignity exhibited" by the one-time dithering president of the bank, has an uncanny ability for finding himself involved in murder and in what inevitably follows. Emma Lathen's ACCOUNTING FOR MURDER (Macmillan, $3.95) has her usual deft portraits of the great and the near-

great who manage to complicate the waking hours of the thoroughly pleasant Mr. Thatcher who once more finds it necessary, in the interest of Sloan, to take a hand in the investigation—this time of the murder of *Fortinbras on Accounts Receivable*. Very pleasant. Do read this.

Julian Symons' THE END OF SOLOMON GRUNDY (Harper & Row, $3.95), is incidentally a study of the backwaters of British life of which we are seldom made aware in this genre. It has been called a "disturbing and angry book" and this is perhaps true if your knowledge of or understanding of England is limited to the writings of many in this field who rarely touch on the undercurrents of life in that country—or, for that matter, anywhere. . . . Solomon Grundy and Tony Kabanga are part of that England which Americans do not always get to know. Recommended.

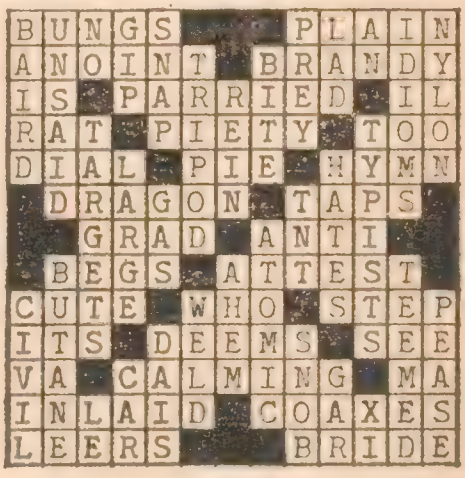
By way of contrast, the world of the Honorable Richard Rollison *is* undeniably better known—at least vicariously — here in the States. John Creasey's THE TOFF IN NEW YORK (Pyramid, 50 cents) and THE TOFF AND THE RUNAWAY BRIDE (Walker, $3.50), are both representative examples of this world and this approach to life. THE TOFF IN NEW YORK (this is the first publication in the United States) has Rollison tangling with some of our local crime talent, while in the other novel he unscrambles the somewhat tangled affairs of some good friends. I frankly liked THE TOFF IN NEW YORK a shade more, but this may be for qualities elaboration upon which would leave no room for discussion of other novels.

Answer

to

Crossword Puzzle

on Page 150



turnabout

by Don von Elsner

MAGGIE O'HARA was blunt in speech and shape. The door leading to her tiny private office said "Chief Security Officer," but to Maggie it meant "Store Detective." They'd called it that twenty years ago, when she started at Chatterton's.

A panel of lights took up one wall. One flickered and Maggie's jaw jutted. "I'll be taking the call on '13' myself," she said into the intercom. She rose and followed her chin to the door. 13 meant first floor, Department three —Diamonds.

The well-dressed woman was looking over a glittering array of velvet trays. Concealed behind a nearby counter, Maggie grimaced. It was the third time in two weeks this woman had scanned the $2,500 to $3,500 tray. And that was the place, where, over the last three months, Chatterton's had lost $12,000 in merchandise. And then it happened.

The woman's action was smooth enough, but Maggie was too old a hand, and the trap too carefully prepared.

Jeff Chatterton was a third generation scion of a merchandising dynasty in the tradition of Wanamaker's and Selfridge's. He insisted upon running a department store with a courtly disregard for reality—until this happened. It'd obviously been an inside job. He had to call in Danning....

She hardly needed the clerk's signal or to check the empty slot to know that a ring had been lifted. The woman was headed toward the elevators now, Maggie twenty steps behind and closing in, when she suddenly turned and entered a powder room. Her quick shift caused a near collision with a sales clerk, who was turning from the drinking fountain.

"Hold it right there, dearie," Maggie said, the door swishing shut behind her. The woman turned slowly, eyebrows raised. She hadn't been out of Maggie's sight three seconds.

"I beg your pardon."

Maggie sighed. Chatterton's "soft' policy extended even to shoplifters, making the store an international target. "Save it, dearie. Come up to the Security Office, give us the ring, sign your little confession card—and don't come back."

The woman smiled cooly. "Is this a joke of some kind —a televison program, or something? Really?"

Maggie's jaw came out. "Can the guff, dearie. I've got flat feet from standing on these marble floors watching dumb operators like you. Now march, or I'll throw the bracelets on you." A business-like pair of handcuffs suddenly dangled from her hand.

"Well! Let's find your superior, by all means!"

Young Nelson was waiting outside. "Don't let anyone in there," Maggie told him. "I'll send down an 'Out of Order' sign, but you stay on it, anyway—hear me?"

Upstairs, Mr. Ashton, the Security Director, and Maggie listened to the time-worn story. The woman was "a respected business woman," a "reputable citizen," a "couturiére with an exclusive clientele." To suggest the humiliation of a search was an "unthinkable outrage." Ashton and Maggie listened, bored. That was before the woman was taken into the searching room by two matrons. The situation became much less boring after that....

Danning lifted the phone "Jeff Chatterton, Colonel. I've got a deuced mess on my hands. Sticky. Could you toddle over, old boy?"

Entering one of the world's largest and most exclusive department stores, Danning reflected upon the curious pressures that could cause him to undertake a case. Jeff Chatterton was a third-generation scion of a merchandising dynasty in the tradition of Wanamakers, Marshall Field's, Selfridge's; a patron

of the arts, a low-handicap golfer, an avid bridge enthusiast—none of which particularly impressed Danning. What did was the fact that Jeff insisted upon running a department store with a courtly disregard for reality. And, contrary to all logic, the store did a fabulous business. Danning even liked the way all the female employees were outfitted in attractive but identical green dresses. "Must be the Irish in me," he thought.

Chatterton was obviously distressed. "Damn it, Dave. It's repugnant—an 'inside' job. It gives me a crawly feeling—having my people steal from me. This business of questioning old and trusted employees . . . accusations, lies, confessions. . . ." He waved a hand. "Sickening. . . ."

Danning had heard the bare outlines. "I'm not convinced it's altogether an inside job. But let's get to your real problem—this $150,000 damage suit."

Chatterton's fist hit the desk. "Damn it, stop twitting me! Who cares a hoot about a suit? It's human relationships I'm concerned about—this dirty shadow of suspicion. *That's* the important thing! Stop sounding like a lawyer and *do* something."

Danning smiled. "Okay, Jeff. Call them in."

Ashton, Maggie, and Nelson were joined by Mrs. Gordon, the saleswoman in charge of diamonds, and Thompson, the floor walker.

Maggie's face was white and tense. "There *has* to be an 'inside' angle," she said grimly. "The damn ring came back—right to its proper slot in the tray. An 'outsider' could have filched it—and I'll swear that woman did—but no outsider could put it back. One of us right here had to be involved in that—and I'm the chief suspect!"

"The facts, please, Maggie," Danning said quietly.

"Okay. When the matrons reported the woman was clean, Ashton kept all three women in the searching room. I got two more matrons to search all three of them—and *I* checked the checker. A cinch—no hiding places in the searching room. Then we turned the plumbers loose in that powder room. Every fixture, every trap. Nelson swears nobody entered or left in the meantime. Of course, he could be lying—just like me. Somebody is!"

Chatterton looked physically ill. "Please, Maggie. Nobody has said——"

"Nobody has to!" Maggie shot back, her jaw jutting. "Then we turned the diamond

section upside down. The ring was gone—just like Mrs. Gordon and I said it was. But right after lunch the next day, it was back! That's the killer, Colonel. We've been keeping an extra tight check on that counter. Thompson—and I—have a key. The clerks are locked in. They have to call one of us to get in or out. No 'customer' could get back there."

Chatterton coughed. "That's when I sent a special messenger with a letter of apology to the woman—a Miss Touraine—whom we'd—er—erroneously a c c u s e d." He shuddered. "A nasty business."

"It gets nastier," Maggie said. "Mrs. Gordon handles the quality diamonds by herself. If she has to leave, Thompson stands guard or flashes for me. But when she goes to lunch, we put another girl behind the counter—usually a little minx named Beatrice from the hosiery section. That day Beatrice breezed up to Thompson at the usual time. He let Mrs. Gordon out, and let her in. When Mrs. Gordon came back, she found the ring."

"But you have only my word," Mrs. Gordon said, "that it was returned at that time."

"I understand," Danning said, frowning. "It certainly makes things look bad for one of you—and for Mr. Chatterton. Mainly because it's been proved that 'this little minx'—Beatrice—has been absent from work the last three days, and is still very much sick in bed—if we can believe the store doctor."

"We can believe him," Maggie said. "She may not be dying, but I went to her apartment last night and took her temperature—101—and it was *my* thermometer! As you say, we've proved she didn't come to work the day the ring was taken or returned." She turned a baleful eye on Thompson.

Thompson was an elderly man with a sad, tired face. He raised his eyes to Jeff Chatterton's. "I worked for your father," he said. "But I guess you'll have to let me go. Maybe it's these damn trifocals . . . hard to get used to . . . I *thought* it was the girl . . . they all look alike. . . ."

Danning turned to Mrs. Gordon. "And you?"

She met his eyes. "It sounds awful. But I *expected* Beatrice. . . . I thought it was she. I guess that puts me in the same boat with Mr. Thompson."

"And that brings us," Danning said, "to the mysterious sales clerk with whom the

suspect collided near the water fountain—as the last possibility for passing the loot."

All eyes darted toward Maggie, and then shifted away. Ashton swallowed. "We've offered a reward—made every effort—no one has come forward—either the girl herself, or anyone who saw her."

"Except me," Maggie said, staring hard at Danning.

Ashton cleared his throat. "Here's the way it would stack up for the cops. One of us in this room is guilty. He or she needed money, made a deal with a clerk who looked something like Beatrice, contrived to divert Thompson's attention when the girl came to the counter so that he let her in mechanically. She stole a few rings over a period of time—on days when Beatrice was absent, probably. But when an innocent person was nabbed, accused, and searched—and all the other hubbub—the real culprit got panicky and had the accomplice return the ice.

"The fact that all our women employees wear "Chatterton green" made the accomplice switch easy. They slip them on when they report for duty, return them to their lockers before leaving the store." He looked directly at Chatterton. "The guilty person could be me. It could be Maggie or Thompson, or Mrs. Gordon, or even Nelson. The accomplice could be any of three hundred girls who took her lunch on the second period on the two critical days. I've dusted everything and the fingerprints are negative. That's all I can do. You can hush it up and fire the lot of us—or turn it over to the police."

Chatterton winced. He looked Chatterton green himself. "I would prefer to forget the whole incident."

Danning smiled wryly. "Including Miss Touraine's $150,000 lawsuit?"

Chatterton's head came up. "Yes! Settle the damn thing. Be liberal!"

Danning shrugged. "Very well. But I may need some assistance with the negotiations." He stood up. "I'll need someone I can trust. I also want the lady in charge of your foundation garments, your top designer, and your beauty consultant." At the door, he turned and smiled. "Well, Maggie, let's get to work."

Gracie's voice came over the intercom. "A Miss Touraine—*lucille touraine originals*—to see you, Colonel."

Danning checked the late

afternoon light. "Send her in."

She was completely gracious. "You called me—in regard to a settlement, of course. I'm in business myself, Mr. Danning. I understand how these things go."

"Indeed. But your business hasn't been too good lately."

She smiled. "Rather beside the point. The adverse publicity would be tragic—to Chatterton's. I don't wish to appear vindictive or piggish. If we can settle amicably for a nominal amount—say a hundred thousand?"

"Would that be for you *and* Beatrice, or just. . . ."

"Beatrice?" Miss Touraine stiffened. "Who's Beatrice?"

"The young lady you collided with near the powder room and slipped the ring to."

Miss Touraine became rigid. "Impossible! Why, that girl was wearing a Chatterton uniform. Beatrice couldn't. . . ."

"I'm afraid she could—and did. A skilled designer like you could have made up a reversible dress. A customer enters the store wearing, say, a navy blue V-necked dress. She enters a powder room and comes out wearing a square-necked Chatterton green. She does what she has to do, pulls a turnabout with the dress, and walks out. Waiting till Beatrice caught a real cold and could be checked by the store doctor was a nice touch." He turned as an attractive young lady entered the room and stood in the shadow.

Miss Touraine was on her feet. "Absurd! Why ——" She looked up, eyes widening with sudden horror. "Beatrice! You little fool! You've ——" With a rush she tore herself from Danning's office.

Maggie stepped forward as Danning flipped off the recorder. She was girdled and corseted, and her hair and face had undergone an amazing change. "I'd have sworn you'd never get away with it—me posing for a young trick like that!"

Danning glanced from her to the snapshot of Beatrice on his desk. "A turnabouter is always a sucker for a turnabout. Besides — you know something, Maggie? You're beautiful!"

"Aw, go on with you." But there was a wet brightness in her eyes. "You not only got the luck of the Irish—you got the bloomin' blarney!"

(Continued from Other Side)

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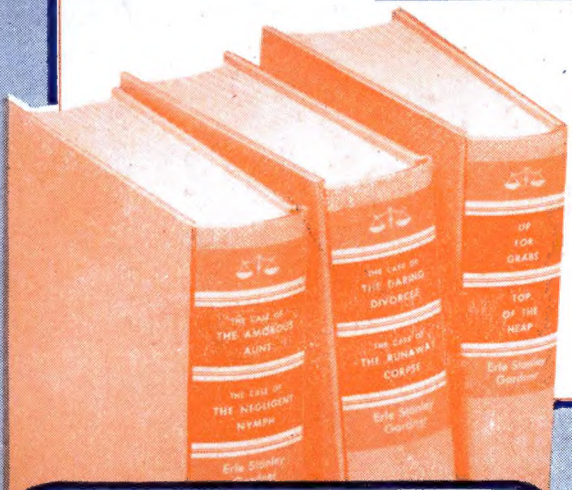

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